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HC allows puja at Gyanvapi mosque

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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PHOTO: UNSPLASH

Monkey fever claims one more life, toll rises to 4

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

A 60-year-old woman from Koorlakai village, in Siddapur Taluk, Uttara Kannada, died of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), also known as monkey fever, on Sunday evening. This brings the State's death toll from the disease to four. The woman had been battling the illness for 20 days and was undergoing treatment at Meggan Hospital in Shivamogga for the last three days. High fever, a key symptom of the tick-borne viral disease, was reported amongst her ailments. The region has witnessed a surge in monkey fever cases, with the current tally reaching 43. As of on Monday Karnataka has 103 active cases. *—Salar News*

ISC postpones Class 12 Chemistry board exam

NEW DELHI/ KOLKATA, 26 FEB

Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations on Monday postponed the class 12 board exam for Chemistry to 21 March citing unforeseen circumstances. While there was no confirmation from the board, sources in some CISCE-affiliated schools in Kolkata claimed that the question paper was reportedly leaked on social media before the commencement of the exams. "Please note, the ISC Year 2024 Chemistry Paper 1 (Theory) Examination, scheduled for Monday, 26th February 2024, has been postponed due to unforeseen circumstances.*—PTI*

Govt suspends IFS officer after row on naming lions

AGARTALA, 26 FEB

Tripura government has suspended IFS officer Pravin L Agrawal following the row over naming a lion and lioness 'Akbar' and 'Sita', on which a case was filed by Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), officials said on Monday. The lion and lioness were sent to Bengal Safari Park in Siliguri from Tripura's Sepahijala Zoological Park on 12 February. VHP's northern West Bengal unit filed a petition before Jalpaiguri circuit bench of Calcutta High Court, praying that the names be changed as it has hurt the religious sentiments. Agrawal, who was posted as Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife & Ecotourism), was suspended on 22 February.*—PTI*

Poverty now at its lowest: PM

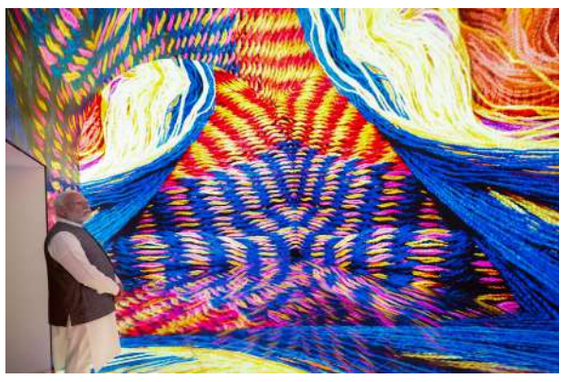
Modi launches 2,000 railway projects worth ₹41,000 cr

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Monday that poverty in India is now at its lowest while household consumption has risen by 2.5 times compared to a decade earlier.

Speaking on the topic of "India: Poised for the Next Big Leap" at the News9 Global Summit, he cited data to say that consumption in rural India has grown at a faster pace than in urban India. The data shows that people's ability to spend on different services and facilities has grown, he asserted, adding that they now have more money to use for things other than food.

"It has happened because of our focus on villages, the poor and farmers," Modi said. His government created infrastructure keeping in mind rural India, empowered women and created new employment opportunities, he said. The percentage of money spent on food is now less than 50 per cent of the total household expenditure for the first time, he said.



Narendra Modi at the inauguration of Bharat Tex 2024, one of the largest-ever global textile events to be organised in the country, at Bharat Mandapam, in New Delhi on Monday *PHOTO: ANI*

34 stations in South Western Railway to be revamped

The Prime Minister inaugurated and laid the foundation for redeveloping 553 railway stations and 1,500 road overbridges and underpasses at a cost of about Rs 41,000 crore across the country under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. Programmes were organised at 2,021 places across the country in which more than 40 lakh people participated.

In South Western Railway, a total of 34 stations will be revamped for Rs 801.95 crore under the scheme. This consists of 28 stations in Karnataka, two in Andhra Pradesh, two in Tamil Nadu and two in Goa. The construction of 24 road overbridges/ underpasses in the State is also included in the scheme.

Modi said today's India is going through a phase of change, the prime example of which is the Indian Railways. A decade ago, the average annual budget of the railways was Rs 45,000 crore, which has now increased to more than Rs 2.5 lakh crore.

Modi also laid the foundation stone for Sikkim's first railway station at Rangpo and said its design will draw inspiration from the rich culture, heritage and architecture of the Himalayan state.

Bharat Tex kicks off

Modi on Monday promised all support to the textiles sector, stressing that it will play a crucial role in making India a developed nation by 2047, when India will complete hundred years of independence.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating Bharat Tex 2024, one of the largest-ever global textile events organised in the country, Modi said the government is working in a wide scope to further increase the contribution of the textiles sector in building a developed India. *—PTI*

BATTLE LINES DRAWN

Will RS polls see cross-voting in Karnataka?

A room at Vidhana Soudha prepared for Rajya Sabha elections in Bengaluru *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Congress on Monday shifted all its MLAs to a hotel ahead of the biennial election to fill four vacancies from Karnataka in Rajya Sabha apparently to keep the flock together.

Five candidates, Ajay Maken, Syed Naseer Hussain, and GC Chandrasekhar (all Congress), Narayansa Bhandage (BJP) and Kupendra Reddy (JD(S)) are in the fray. All parties have issued whips to MLAs, who are the voters in Tuesday's poll, amid apprehensions of cross-voting. Congress has 134 MLAs, BJP has 66, JD (S) 19, while others account for four. Of the four others, Congress claims the support of two independents and Darshan Puttanaiah from Sarvodaya Karnataka Paksha and is confident of winning three seats.

The election is necessitated due to the retirement of Union Minister Rajeev Chandrashekar from BJP, and Congress' Chandrashekar, L Hanumanthaiah and Hussain, on 2 April, after the expiry of the six-year term. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Cong holds mock voting session

Bengaluru, 26 Feb

Congress MLAs took part in a mock voting session on Monday to ensure there is no shortage of votes. Addressing reporters at a private hotel, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said, "The legislators participated in the mock voting session and will stay at the hotel. They will proceed directly to the voting venue from here." There is speculation that Congress has 138 MLAs to win Rajya Sabha elections for four seats, and a candidate needs at least 45 votes to win. *—Salar News*

'Indians duped to fight Russia war discharged'

They were deceived into travelling to Russia under false promises of job opportunities *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Several Indians, who worked as support staff to the Russian army, were "discharged" following India's demand, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Monday.

It said India remains committed, as a matter of "top priority", to actively pursuing with the Russian authorities all the relevant cases of Indian nationals for an early discharge from the Russian army.

"We have seen some inaccurate reports in the media regarding Indians with the Russian army seeking help for discharge," the MEA said in a statement.

Last week, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said New Delhi was in touch with Moscow for early "discharge" of Indians working as support staff to the Russian Army and urged its nationals to stay away from the conflict zone in Ukraine. Jammu and Kashmir Students Association said it wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar seeking their intervention for repatriation of two youths "trapped" in Russia. National convener of the association, Nasir Khuehami, said that Azad Yusuf Kumar and several others have been ensnared in a fraudulent recruitment, wherein they were deceived into travelling to Russia under false promises of job opportunities. *—PTI*

Surat man fighting for Russia dies

A 23-year-old man from Surat working as a "helper" for the Russian Army was killed in a Ukrainian missile strike in a war zone, as per the claim made by his relatives. Relatives of the deceased, Hemil Mangukiya, on Monday, urged the Centre to help them get back his mortal remains. Surat district collector Sourabh Pardhi said no official confirmation has been received as of now. *—PTI*

MULTI-NUTRIENT SUPPLEMENT

K'taka launches Annapoorna programme for govt schools

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday launched a State-wide Annapoorna Morning Nutrition Programme in all government schools.

The programme is a brainchild of Sadguru Sri Madhusudan Sai, with the motto – 'Let no child go to school hungry ever.'

According to Sri Sathya Sai Annapoorna Trust, Karnataka has been the hub of Annapoorna's services for the past nine years, and what started with just feeding 50 children in the state, growing in phases to about 3, 62,243 children across 5,085 schools, has today whizzed through the whole of Karnataka to reach 53,619 schools embracing under its care an additional 55 lakh children. With this, almost all the government school-going children in Karnataka will receive their morning nutrition through a 'unique' multi-nutrient supplement, 'SaiSure', specially customised for children, a Trust statement said.

A budget of about Rs 731 crore has also been approved for this programme this year *PHOTO: PTI*

Since 2013, Karnataka government's 'Ksheera Bhagya' initiative has supplied milk to government school-going children five days a week. A budget of about Rs 731 crore has also been approved for this programme this year. The farming community of Karnataka is also benefiting in a big way as Trust purchases organically-grown ragi millet through which offers compensates the farmers fairly enough for their livelihood, much above MSP. *—PTI*

ACT OR WE WILL: SUPREME COURT RAPS GOVERNMENT IN COAST GUARD CASE

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Declaring that women cannot be left out, Supreme Court on Monday told Centre to ensure that women are granted permanent commissions in Indian Coast Guard and said the court will do it if the government doesn't.

A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said this while taking note of submissions by Attorney General R Venkataramani that there were some functional and operational difficulties in granting permanent commissions to Short Service Commission Officers (SSCOs). Previously, the bench had said that the maritime force must come up with a policy that treats women "fairly". The top court was hearing a plea filed by Indian Coast Guard officer Priyanka Tyagi seeking the grant of permanent commission to eligible women short-service commission officers of the force."You speak of 'nari shakti'. Now show it here. You are in the deep end of the sea in this matter. You must come up with a policy which treats women fairly," the bench said. *—PTI*

Jarange ends fast; net shut in M'rashtra

MUMBAI/JALNA, 26 FEB

Activist Manoj Jarange on Monday announced he is withdrawing his 17-day-old fast undertaken over the Maratha quota issue.

However insisted he would continue his agitation until the Maharashtra government starts issuing Kunbi caste certificates to extended family members of people already having such documents, thereby allowing them to avail reservation benefits.

A curfew was imposed in Ambad taluka of Jalna district, where Jarange was on an indefinite hunger strike since 10 February, while Internet services were suspended on Monday in Jalna, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar and Beed districts from 6am to 4pm to maintain law and order in view of the Maratha quota agitation, officials said.

At a special session last week, the state legislature unanimously passed a bill providing 10 per cent separate reservation for the Maratha community in education and government jobs. Jarange, sitting on the hunger strike at Antarwali Sarati village in Jalna district, however, insisted on quota for the Marathas under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category and had continued his fast.

A state transport bus was set on fire at Tirathpuri village under Ambad tehsil, police said.

Meanwhile, the Bombay High Court on Monday said the Maharashtra government cannot remain a mute spectator amid the Maratha quota protests and had powers to maintain law and order. Speaking in Antarwali Sarati village earlier on Sunday, Jarange alleged Fadnavis was trying to kill him. The activist also announced that he would march to Mumbai and protest outside the residence of the deputy CM. *—PTI*

END OF AN ERA

'Jeeye toh jeeye kaise bin aap ke': Ghazal singer Pankaj Udhas dies at 72

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

Ghazal singer Pankaj Udhas, 72, whose velvet smooth voice gave expression to the many colours of love, longing, and heartache in songs such as 'Chitthi ayee hai' and 'Aur ahista kijiye baatein, died on Monday after a prolonged illness.

Udhas, who also made a mark as a playback singer in many Hindi films, including 'Dayavan', 'Naam', 'Saajan' and 'Mohra', died around 11am at Breach Candy Hospital.

"With a very heavy heart, we are saddened to inform you of the sad demise of Padmashri Pankaj Udhas on 26 February, 2024 due to a prolonged illness," his daughter Nayaab wrote in an Instagram post.

The last rites of the singer, who hit his peak in the 1990s, will be held on Tuesday. He is survived by his wife Farida and daughters Reva and Nayaab.

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were among the many who mourned the singer's death.

"Pankaj Udhas ji, honoured with Padma Shri and other awards, made an important contribution to popularising music. My condolences to his family and fans," Murmu said.

According to Modi, Udhas' singing conveyed a range of emotions and his ghazals spoke directly to the soul.

Pankaj Udhas *PHOTO: PTI*

9 FAMOUS SONGS OF PANKAJ UDHAS

- Naa Kajaare ki dhar
- Aur ahista kijiye baatein
- Ghungroo toot gaye
- Chitthi aayee hai
- Chandi jaisa rang hai tera, sone jaise baal
- Aaj fir tum pe pyaar aaya
- Mohabbat inyat karam dekhte hain
- Jaaneman karwate badal badal
- Chahat desh se aane wale

"He was a beacon of Indian music, whose melodies transcended generations. I recall my various interactions with him over the years. His departure leaves a void in the music world that can never be filled. Condolences to his family and admirers. Om Shanti," Modi said.

Udhas, one of those credited for making the genre popular along with Talat Aziz and Jagjit Singh, released his first album "Aahat" in 1980 and went on to release over 50 albums in a four-decade career.

Udhas was synonymous with ghazals, an Arabic word that means "conversing with the beloved". It developed in Persia in the 10th century AD from the Arabic verse form 'qasida'.

Udhas, who received Padma Shri in 2006, was also a science graduate working to eradicate thalassemia.

He was born in Gujarat's Rajkot town to a family of musicians. His father Keshubhai Udhas played the string instrument Dilruba, and his two elder brothers Manhar Udhas and Nirmal Udhas were well-known singers too.

Pankaj initially started learning tabla at the Sangeet Natya Academy in Rajkot. However, he was more inclined towards Hindustani classical music and started learning from Ghulam Qadir Khan. *—PTI*

METRO SACKS 1 FOR DENYING FARMER ENTRY

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Bengaluru Metro on Monday sacked a security supervisor for allegedly barring a farmer from using its train services for being "inappropriately dressed." A commuter had posted a video of the 18 February incident at Rajajinagar Metro station on X.

In the video posted by the commuter on Saturday, the security supervisor was seen barring the after which a commuter who was standing in line for a security check intervened and questioned the security staff. *—PTI*

Three killed, six injured in accident

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Three people died and six were injured after the tempo they were travelling suffered a flat tyre and overturned on the national highway in Davangere on Monday. The injured individuals were rushed to the KIMS Hospital in Hubballi, with one person reported to be in critical condition. Identified as residents of Singarajanahalli in Andhra Pradesh's Kurnool district, the victims were transporting Byadgi chillies Haveri at the time of the accident.The incident unfolded on the Bengaluru-Pune National Highway 48 near Punjabi Dhaba on the outskirts of Davangere. While the identities of the deceased and injured are yet to be confirmed, police have launched an investigation into the matter. *—Salar News*

Fire breaks out at factory in Kengeri, doused

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

A major fire broke out at a godown near Hoysala Circle in Kengeri, Bengaluru, on Monday afternoon, causing significant damage to the property. The fire reportedly started around 12.30pm and quickly engulfed the godown, raising concerns among people in the vicinity. Local residents reported witnessing thick smoke and hearing loud noises during the fire, causing a temporary disruption to traffic flow in the area. According to the Nagarbhavi fire department, the fire was controlled by 1.45pm. While the exact cause of the fire is yet to be determined, an investigation is underway to ascertain the source of the ignition. A fire and rescue personnel, told Salar News, "Luckily there were no casualties and they investigating this incident." Even though there were no casualties this incident sheds light on the problem of water scarcity in the City as well.*—Salar News*

120 hour digital learning plan for govt colleges

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar finalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Collegiate and Technical Education and the Skills Development Network of Wadhwani Group to implement an Employability Skills Development Programme of Digital Learning in Government First Grade Colleges, Government Polytechnics, and Government Engineering Colleges Statewide. Speaking about the collaboration, Sudhakar said under another agreement with the British Council, 15 students from Gulbarga University visited Dandi University in London. The 120-hour programme, featuring industry-vetted e-learning content delivered through an online learning management platform aims to enhance student's skills in areas such as effective speaking and listening, problem-solving and innovation Sudhakar also addressed concerns about centre's grants for the Model programme structure highlighting the disparity in funding distribution among states. *—Salar News*

Man arrested for murder of senior citizen

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

A man was arrested for the murder of a 70-year-old woman, identified as Sushilamma, in the KR Puram area of Bengaluru. The body was cut into five pieces and had been placed in a drum. The body was found dumped at a vacant lot near an abandoned house. Sushilamma had been residing with her daughter and relatives in a rented flat near Nisarga Layout, close to KR Puram. According to the press release by Bengaluru City police, it was found that the accused was in debt and killed the woman for her jewellery. Police revealed that the perpetrators had severed the woman's arms and legs, which are currently missing. The body was found when the residents complained of a foul smell from the area. *—Salar News*

Thousands seek opportunity at job fair

The two-day job fair organised by government has 1.10 lakh job openings

BENGALURU, FEB 26

Thousands of job seekers made a beeline to the 'Yuva Samruddhi Sammelana' job fair held at Bengaluru Palace Grounds organised by Karnataka Skill Development Corporation on Monday.

Over 600 companies including Amazon, Bosch, L&T, Toyota, Schindler and others took part in the fair. The fair has more than 1.10L job openings for which 75,000 job seekers registered online. Thousands more registered offline too. College students, graduates, post-graduates and middle-aged men and women from across State attended the fair seeking better jobs opportunities.

However, the candidates were only allowed to a maximum of six companies. The hopeful candidates' were disappointed as they expected on-spot interviews but the companies just collected their resumes and promised to call them back.

Kiran, an engineering graduate, who had travelled from Karwar, said, "We have spent so much money and hard work on the course. We do not expect a great package but at least a good job can help me and my family."

Large number of aspirants applied for jobs at MNCs. However, new companies witnessed a dearth of candidates.

Youths arrive at Palace Grounds for Youth Prosperity Conference, a Job Fair 2024, on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Nidhi, an MBA graduate, told Salar News, "There are a lot of opportunities for MBA graduates but tons of resumes are being handed over to the companies. They are telling us we will call back but to how many people can they call back." An newly opened automotive company said they had openings for 10 positions but only four people had applied for them.

"We expected more registration since this is an event for 1 lakh job seekers," Imperial Tobacco Company (ITC) representative said.

Karnataka Skill Development Minister Sharan Prakash Patil said that every year in Karnataka, about 9.3 lakh pre-university (PU) students, 62,437 students from Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), 48,153 students from polytechnic institutes and roughly 4,80,000 students from other colleges pass out. However, he said the unemployment rate is at 2.4 per cent as per Periodic Labor Force Survey Q3-2024.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah inaugurated the fair. He targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi over unemployment in the country. "Modi won the elections with votes of students and youth. If Modi has acted on his promise of creating 2 crore jobs annually in 2014, the country should have created 20 crore jobs in the last 10 years. Unfortunately, even existing jobs are lost and unemployment rate has mounted to a record 8.40 per cent," he said.

He promised to ensure that skill-based job training and more Udyog Melas will be organised and even district level job fairs will be held.

He said his government has delivered on its promise of unemployment allowance under Yuva Nidhi Guarantee

Speaking about the Yuva Nidhi guarantee for unemployed youth, Minister for Skills Development Sharanaprakash Patil said, "Yuva Nidhi has received response from 1.4 lakh unemployed graduates and diploma holders." *—Salar News*

Denial of entry to UK prof sparks political slugfest

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

A political slugfest has erupted between the ruling Congress and BJP in the State over a United Kingdom professor being denied entry into India to attend a State government-organised conference on the Constitution here.

Ministers alleged on Monday the incident shows how individual rights as well the rights of the State governments are being trampled upon, while BJP described the professor at the University of Westminster Nitasha Kaul, who is also an Overseas Citizen of India, "a known terrorist sympathizer & one who constantly spews venom & disseminates anti-India propaganda."

Kaul has alleged that she was denied entry into India to attend on the invitation of the government of Karnataka the two-day 'Constitution and National Unity Convention-2024' on 24 and 25 February.

"Denied entry to India for speaking on democratic & constitutional values. I was invited to a conference as esteemed delegate by Govt of Karnataka (Congress-ruled state) but Centre refused me entry. All my documents were valid & current (UK passport & OCI)," she said on 'X' on Sunday along with pictures of the invitation extended to her by the government and other conference-related communications. Karnataka Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa said on Monday the denial "is a fresh demonstration of how the rights of state governments are being repeatedly trampled".

BJP State President BY Vijayendra condemned the government for inviting her."Highly Disgusting of the @siddaramaiah govt to whitewash the crimes of 'TUKDE TUKDE GANG' by inviting its sympathizer Nitasha Kaul for a talk on 'Constitution & Unity of India'," Vijayendra said on a social media site 'X'.

He added that it was equally disgusting that all the top leaders of the Congress party attended the conference. Minister for Large and Medium Industries MB Patil said the incident showed "what type of democracy is there in India, how does the BJP respects the Constitution and the status of the freedom of speech and individual freedom". *—PTI*

The budget proceedings were halted on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Assembly, legislature adjourned to Wednesday

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

- The funeral of Naik was held in Yadgir on Monday with the guard of honour and State anthem by the State government

State legislative Assembly and legislative council sessions were adjourned to Wednesday following the demise of Congress MLA Raja Venkatappa Naik who passed away on Sunday due to a heart attack. The budget proceedings were halted on Monday while Speaker of Assembly UT Khader and Speaker of Council Basavaraj Horatti offered a condolences motion.

Addressing the condolence motion, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah praised Naik, a four-time Congress MLA, for his grassroots connection and dedication to serving the people. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar added Naik's harmonious approach to life, quoting Vivekananda's teachings on living with purpose.

Opposition Leader R Ashoka acknowledged Naik's amiable nature and ability to achieve results through kindness and determination, noting his avoidance of conflict and focus on only the problem-solving of people. The last day of the Assembly session, which was scheduled to end on Friday, was extended to Monday due to the uproar caused by Opposition parties BJP and JD(S).

The funeral of Naik was held in Yadgir on Monday with the guard of honour and State anthem by the State government. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, All India Congress Conference President Mallikarjun Kharge, IT-BT and Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge attended the final rites. *—Salar News*

JD(S), BJP SEAT-SHARING TALKS ON: HDK

KOLAR, 26 FEB

'Former chief minister and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy has stated that the seat-sharing formula between BJP and JD(S) is being worked out and so far no final decision has been taken in this regard. Addressing the media at Kolar on Monday, he said JD(S) party workers are demanding for Kolar seat as the party has a strong base in the district. He also alleged that BJP is claiming it based on its victory in the last Lok Sabha elections. Mulbagal legislator Samruddhi Manjunath is a possible candidate from JD(S) and BJP's S Muniswamy the present member of Lok Sabha.

Kumarawamy said Congress is spending money on advertisement and is boasting itself of taking up various developmental works in the State. Though the State Government has earmarked Rs 620 crores to provide Rs 2000 each to farmers, the major share of the earmarked fund is from the Union government.

He pointed out that instead of spending so much on advertisement, the government should have announced relief to drought-affected farmers.

Referring to the Rajya Sabha polls, he said the strategy of the BJP JD(S) will be revealed today. *—Salar News*

Water levels dip in Kabini reservoir

MYSURU, 26 FEB

Due to scant rainfall, water levels in Kabini reservoirs have dipped at an alarming rate, posing a threat to the drinking water needs of Mysuru.

The water level has plummeted to 70ft from its maximum capacity of 84ft. Despite the storage capacity of 19.52 TMC only 12 TMC of water is currently stored in the reservoir. Of the 12 TMC stored water, only 8.5 TMC is usable for drinking purposes while the remaining 3.5 TMC is categorised as dead storage. Kabini Reservoir serves as a crucial water source for Bengaluru and Mysuru with a daily release of 500 cusecs of water. Currently, 300 cusecs of water is being directed to Bengaluru, *—Salar News*

The water level has decreased to 70ft from its capacity of 84ft *PHOTO: SALAR*

AMID FEARS OF CROSS VOTING

Cong keeps its flock together at City hotel ahead of RS polls

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Amid fears of cross-voting ahead of the Rajya Sabha election on Tuesday, Congress shifted its 134 MLAs to the luxurious Hilton Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park. They were herded to the hotel on Monday amid the ongoing Budget session.

The MLAs will leave the hotel after 9am on Tuesday in batches and are expected to ink their fingers at the designated polling stations in Vidhana Soudha 10am onwards.

Reportedly, the hotel is out of bounds for regular visitors. The gunmen and drivers of the MLAs have also been asked to keep away from the premises and are to hang around in the parking lot, although food has been arranged for them.

According to the staff, only guests who made reservations a month or before have been given rooms. Central Crime Branch (CCB) officials did a background check of all the guests in the hotel.

Congress shifted its 135 MLAs to the luxurious Hilton Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park *PHOTO: SALAR*

The police put up barricades in and around the hotel, restricting vehicular movement.

The tight security has flabbergasted the techies working at Manayata Tech Park.

Nagawara, Hennur Main Road, Hebbal Flyover, HBR and HRBR Layout witnessed slow-moving traffic on Monday as the MLAs and their supporters made a beeline to the hotel.

On Friday, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who is also State Congress President, said the MLAs will be kept at a hotel. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala held a legislature party meeting at 3.30pm on Monday in the hotel.

BJP slams Cong for shifting MLAs

BJP criticised Congress over its plan to shift MLAs to a hotel ahead of Rajya Sabha elections for four seats.

"The Congress government led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is mired in enjoyment which came to power through blatant lies. It has indulged in the enjoyment of the taxpayers' money of the state and is back to resort politics again," the Karnataka BJP wrote on social media.

BJP alleged that the people in Karnataka are migrating to other states after getting their children out of the schools but the Congress is taking the MLAs to resort for enjoyment.

"The ATM government has come to power not to develop the state, or to ensure welfare of the people. The Congress government is carrying out foreign trips, tours during Telangana state election, New Delhi trips to meet high command and resort tourism in the money of Kannada people and rendering them bankrupt," the BJP said.

The BJP alleged that the single agenda of the Congress is to spend recklessly for the amusement of party leaders. *—Salar News*

Ahead of RS polls, Gali meets CM & DyCM

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Gali Janardhana Reddy, mining baron and leader of Kalyana Rajya Pragati Paksha Party, on Monday met Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar at CM's official residence Cauvery in Bengaluru.

The meeting comes ahead of the Rajya Sabha election on Tuesday for the four seats in the State.

Kannada and Culture and Backward Classes Minister Shivaraj Tangadagi, a close acquaintance of Reddy, accompanied him.

Janardhana Reddy *PHOTO: FB*

- Reddy was a mining baron from Ballari. He was also a former minister for tourism and infrastructure from BJP in 2008. In 2020, he formed his party

It is speculated that the meeting was to request Reddy to vote for Congress. However, neither Congress nor Reddy have disclosed the details. They termed it as a courtesy call. Congress is in a dicey situation as it has suffered a loss of vote due to the death of Shorapur MLA Raja Venkatappa Naik.

It is alleged that JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy had also met Reddy to convince him to vote for the JD(S)-BJP alliance candidate Kupendra Reddy. However, Reddy has kept mum over which party he will support in the Rajya Sabha elections.

Reddy has also appointed Shivakumar's close acquaintance Yogendra Vikram as his party's election agent for the Rajya Sabha polls.

Reddy was a mining baron from Ballari. He was also a former minister for tourism and infrastructure from BJP in 2008. In 2020, he formed his party. *—Salar News*

Parties can be sued for defamation too: HC

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

The Karnataka High Court recently declared that political parties could indeed face defamation proceedings, while hearing a case in which the BJP argued that a political party being an 'association of people' should not be subject to defamation laws.

This decision came during the hearing of a petition by the BJP challenging defamation proceedings initiated by Rizwan Arshad, the Congress MLA from Bengaluru's Shivajinagar.

BJP's counsel argued that the party, being an "association of people," should not be subject to defamation laws. The council also contended that the complaint lacked merit.

However, opposing counsel said Indian Penal Code (IPC) defines the term "person," encompassing unincorporated bodies of individuals. Justice Krishna Dixit noted that even unincorporated bodies could be considered "persons" under Section 11 of the IPC. He clarified that entities like governments and companies could indeed have reputations, thus making them eligible for defamation proceedings.

The bench highlighted the seriousness of the accusations, including claims made about fake voter ID cards. *—PTI*

WALKING FOREST DICTIONARY

KM Chinnappa, who revived Nagarhole, dead

MADIKERI, 26 FEB

KM Chinnappa, 84, who was synonymous with Nagarhole and wildlife protection, died at his residence in Kumatoor in Srimangala, Kodagu on Monday. He was affectionately known as the walking forest dictionary.

Born in 1941 in Kumtur village near Nagarhole to a soldier who fought in the First World War, Chinnappa spent his youth roaming the forests of his ancestral land, listening to birds, watching the cavalcade of animals in their habitat, absorbing the everyday miracles of the rich eco-system.

KM Chinnappa joined the forest department as an officer in 1967 and was made the RFO of Nagarhole *PHOTO: SALAR*

He joined the forest department as an officer in 1967 and was made the RFO of Nagarhole. Nagarhole was in ruins at that time. Hunting had taken its toll. There were hardly any deer left, forget tigers and other big game. He saved the forest by stopping timber smuggling, cultivation of ganja inside plantations and poaching activities. Nagarhole revived, expanding from a 250 sq km part to 640 sq km.

He spearheaded campaign against timber logging inside protected areas.

He trained more than 2,500 forest protection staff in anti-poaching operations and fire protection.

Chinnappa's effort to protect Nagarhole through 1960s to 1980s led to increase in the prey density and the carnivore population. Chinnappa has also won Chief Minister's gold medal in 1985.

In 1992, he was implicated in the killing of a poacher in and a riot erupted. A frenzied mob ransacked the Forest Department's buildings, burnt vehicles, assaulted staff, set fire to large swathes of forest land and set ablaze Chinnappa's ancestral home. He was cleared of all charges, but he opted for a voluntary retirement after the incident.

After his early retirement, Chinnappa educated school children, teachers, rural youth and villagers on conservation. He used their help to save the forest.

He also served as the president of Wildlife First, an NGO advocating the cause of conservation since 1995. His motto was "Without humans, the forest will flourish. Without forests, we humans cannot flourish." *—Salar News*

SC seeks ED response on Sanjay Singh's bail plea

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Supreme Court sought Enforcement Directorate's (ED) response on Monday on a bail plea moved by Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Sanjay Singh in a money-laundering case related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta issued a notice to the federal agency on the plea, in which Singh challenged Delhi High Court order that refused to grant bail to him in the case. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing in the court on behalf of Singh, sought the issuance of a notice on the bail plea and requested tagging the plea along with the pending matter. He said the pending matter is scheduled to come up for a hearing on 5 March and therefore, both matters should be taken up together. The bench agreed to the request and said both the pleas will be taken up together. *—PTI*

TMC leader Bijan Das shot dead in West Bengal

KOLKATA, 26 FEB

A 49-year-old TMC leader from Ashoknagar in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district was shot dead by a group of men, following an altercation between them over a land deal, police said on Monday. The TMC leader, identified as Bijan Das, was killed when he went to the house of a party colleague, he added. Das, the deputy head of Guma 1 panchayat, was shot twice from point-blank range, the police officer said, adding that one bullet hit his head and another pierced through his left ear." He was declared brought dead when he was taken to the Barasat Medical College and Hospital. The accused are absconding," the police officer told PTI. Barasat MP Kakali Ghosh Dastidar, who went to the hospital, said that it was a "tragic incident". *—PTI*

Madras HC sets aside discharge of DMK minister

CHENNAI, 26 FEB

Madras High Court on Monday set aside a 2023 special court order discharging DMK minister I Periyasamy in connection with a corruption case. Justice N Anand Venkatesh allowed the suo motu revision initiated by High Court and directed the special court to recommence the trial and complete it on or before 31 March. Further details on the court ruling are awaited. Periyasamy is the third minister of Stalin's cabinet who stands to lose his job due to allegations of corruption. Earlier, Minister Senthil Balaji was arrested by Directorate of Enforcement (ED) on 14 June in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged cash-for-jobs scam when he was Transport Minister during an earlier AIADMK regime. Senthil Balaji recently tendered his resignation, eight months after his arrest by ED. Another Tamil Nadu Minister facing corruption charges is Higher Education Minister K Ponmudi. He was sentenced to 3 years simple imprisonment by Madras High Court on 21 December in a disproportionate assets case. The court stayed the sentence imposed to allow him to appeal before Supreme Court. *—ANI*

Sanjay's aide gets bail on Jumbo Covid centres scam

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

A magistrate court granted bail to businessman Sujit Patkar, a close aide of Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut, in a case related to the alleged jumbo Covid centres scam, on the "ground of parity", noting that other accused have been extended a similar relief and chargesheet filed. Patkar, however, won't walk out of jail as he is in judicial custody in a money laundering case being investigated by the Enforcement Directorate. The court noted that the investigation in the matter is completed and a chargesheet has been filed against Patkar and other accused. *—PTI*

No reason to not arrest Sheikh, says Calcutta HC

TMC says Shahjahan Sheikh will be arrested in a week

KOLKATA, 26 FEB

Calcutta High Court Chief Justice on Monday ordered to add Trinamool Congress leader Sheikh Shahjahan to the Sandeshkhali case.

The HC Justice asked to issue a notice in the case and said, "There is no reason to not arrest him."

"Public notice shall be given in this case. There is no stay order in Sandeshkhali cases. There is no reason to not arrest him," the Court said.

Hours after Calcutta High Court clarified that there is "no stay order" on the arrest of Trinamool Congress leader Sheikh Shahjahan and West Bengal Police is free to arrest TMC leader, the party said that the prime accused in the Sandeshkhali case, who has been at large since last month, will be arrested in a week.

Also, hitting out at the West Bengal government and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over Sandeshkhali incident, Union Minister of State (MoS) Nisith Pramanik said that if Mamata is unable to arrest Sheikh Shahjahan, they should seek the help of Central government which is fully present to support the state. *—ANI*

BJP hit out at Mamata Banerjee over absconding Shahjahan Sheikh *PHOTO: X*

Houses of local TMC leaders ransacked

KOLKATA, 26 FEB

Fresh protests erupted in parts of trouble-torn Sandeshkhali in West Bengal on Monday as locals ransacked properties of local TMC leaders, accused of tormenting villagers in the region, police said.

Armed with sticks, they attacked a few houses in Bermajur area of Sandeshkhali, venting their fury against local TMC panchayat leader Shankar Sardar, a senior officer said.

Shankar, an accused of land grabbing, was not at home but his family members were beaten up by the villagers, he said.

"The police for years did nothing. That is why we are doing everything to get back our land," a protester said.

However, Shankar's family denied the charge.

The police later entered the area and tried to pacify the protesters.

The fresh protests erupted after a TMC delegation visited the restive Sandeshkhali for the second consecutive day on Sunday. *—PTI*

POLICE ARREST TMC LEADER AJIT MAITY

NORTH 24 PARGANAS, 26 FEB

Sandeshkhali police arrested Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Ajit Maity on Monday in the troubled region. According to the police, Maity was detained yesterday and arrested this morning.

He is a TMC MLA from Paschim Medinipur's Pingla Assembly constituency."I'm repeatedly requesting with folded hands that if I have taken away someone's land or money, then give it in writing to the police. If I have made a mistake, I will apologise. If any evidence is found against me, I will take responsibility," Maity said.Maity, earlier on Friday, was chased by angry villagers as they broke through fences and physically assaulted him in the presence of media crew.Visuals from the site showed villagers ransacking Maity's house and beating him with slippers. Earlier on Sunday, six members of an independent fact-finding committee, on their way to Sandeshkhali, were arrested at Bhojerhat in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district. *—ANI*

LS POLLS 2024

Jharkhand Cong MP Geeta Koda joins BJP

RANCHI, 26 FEB

Ahead of the Lok Sabha election, Congress MP from Singhbhum (Jharkhand), Geeta Koda, wife of former Jharkhand Chief Minister Madhu Koda, joined the BJP on Monday.

She joined the BJP in the presence of Jharkhand BJP Chief Babulal Marandi at the party's state office.

Singhbhum MP was reportedly unhappy with alliances forged by the Congress party in the state, sources said. She has reportedly sent in her resignation to the Party high command. Her resignation will be a loss for the party ahead of the Lok Sabha election.

Earlier, highlighting the differences among the INDIA bloc members, BJP Jharkhand President Babulal Marandi asked whether this alliance exists and called the group an amalgamation of "corrupt people".Referring to the recent moves by Mamata Banerjee and Arvind Kejriwal to say no to an alliance with the Congress in West Bengal and Punjab, Marandi said, "INDI alliance was not in existence, and in the future as well, it will not come into existence. Mamata Banerjee is saying that she will not be giving any seats to the left and Congress in West Bengal. Arvind Kejriwal has also clarified his stance on Punjab and Haryana, saying that he will not be doing seat sharing.

"INDIA alliance is just an amalgamation of corrupt people; they are so scared of Modi that somehow they just want to safeguard them. But their character and past are known to the public," he added. *—ANI*

Jharkhand Cong MP, Geeta Koda being welcomed by BJP Chief Babulal Marandi in Ranchi on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

CPI names candidates for 4 Lok Sabha seats

T'PURAM, 26 FEB

The Communist Party of India (CPI) on Monday announced candidates for four Kerala Lok Sabha seats, nominating senior party leader Annie Raja to contest from the Wayanad constituency, a seat presently held by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

Notably, Pannian Raveendran has been nominated from Thiruvananthapuram, VS Sunil Kumar from Thrissur, and Arun Kumar from Mavelikara.

Congress' Rahul Gandhi is currently the MP from the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) is part of the INDIA bloc, which came into existence to take on the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which is led by PM Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and prevent it from winning a third straight term at the Centre in the Lok Sabha elections.CPI General Secretary D Raja is also one of the member of Coordination Committee and Election Strategy Committee. *—ANI*

AP govt urges SC to cancel Naidu's bail

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Andhra Pradesh government on Monday requested Supreme Court to cancel the bail granted to TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu in the skill development corporation scam, claiming his family members have made statements to "intimidate" public servants to hamper the probe.

The government told a bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal that Naidu's family members have made statements publicly that they would take action against the officers.

"We have filed an application for filing of additional documents. Statements have been made by the family members of the accused (Naidu). The family members are saying when we come to power, we will take action against all these officers," senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Andhra Pradesh government, said.Rohatgi told the bench that benefit or liberty of bail cannot be given to those who make such threatening statements just before elections.

Senior advocate Harish Salve, appearing for Naidu, said they would file a response to the application. *—PTI*

Will scrap 'Agnipath' scheme, if voted to power, says Congress

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Stepping up its attack on the Union government over the "Agnipath" military recruitment scheme, the Congress alleged on Monday that "gross injustice" was done to youngsters and asserted that it would revert to the old recruitment scheme if voted to power at the Centre.

Congress Chief Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to President Droupadi Murmu on Monday, highlighting the "gross injustice" done to the youngsters seeking regular employment in the armed forces due to the "Agnipath" scheme, and urged her to ensure justice for them.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here, Congress general secretary Sachin Pilot said there was no demand for such a scheme.

"In the long term, this scheme will not benefit anybody except saving some money for the government of India. We in the Congress party feel that we should go back to the old recruitment system," Pilot said.If some changes are to be introduced to modernise the armed forces, that is very much possible in the current setup, but to completely eradicate the old system is not right, he added. *—PTI*

Sachin Pilot *PHOTO: PTI*

Cong guarantees ₹5K for poor in Andhra Pradesh

ANANTAPUR, 26 FEB

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge kicked off the party's election campaign for Andhra Pradesh at Anantapur on Monday, promising to dole out Rs 5,000 every month for eligible poor households. Kharge termed the monthly dole a poll promise greater than the five 'guarantees' being fulfilled in Karnataka and the six being implemented in Telangana. *—PTI*

Kejri says sorry for sharing fake video

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday told Supreme Court that he made a mistake by retweeting an allegedly defamatory video circulated by YouTuber Dhruv Rathee related to BJP IT Cell.

A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, without issuing notice on a plea of Kejriwal challenging a Delhi High Court order that upheld summons issued to him as an accused in the criminal defamation case, asked the complainant whether he wanted to close the matter given the chief minister's apology.

The bench also asked the trial court not to take up the defamation case involving Kejriwal till 11 March.

The High Court had said a sense of responsibility has to be attached while retweeting content about which one does not know and added that retweeting of defamatory content must invite penal, wrongful action if the person retweeting it does not attach a disclaimer. *—PTI*

Kejriwal skips 7th ED summons

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will not appear before Enforcement Directorate on Monday in connection with the alleged Delhi excise policy scam-linked money laundering probe and the agency should wait for the court order instead of issuing summonses repeatedly.

This is the seventh time that Kejriwal has skipped ED summons. The agency had issued the seventh summons to Kejriwal last week asking him to appear before it for questioning. Kejriwal has skipped all the summonses so far, terming them "illegal".

He had also written to ED seeking their withdrawal. In a statement, AAP said he will not appear before ED. A Delhi court will hear the matter of the validity of ED summons on 16 March and the agency should wait for its order instead of sending summonses. *—PTI*

Arvind Kejriwal *PHOTO: ANI*

Vasan-led TMC firms up alliance with BJP

Vasan's announcement marks the first official tie-up BJP has managed to forge in Tamil Nadu ahead of the polls *PHOTO:ANI*

CHENNAI, 26 FEB

In its attempt to forge a non-DMK, non-AIADMK bloc for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, BJP on Monday struck an alliance with GK Vasan-led Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) in Tamil Nadu, with the regional party expressing hope more organisations will join NDA in the state.

BJP state unit hailed Vasan and said his advice will be used in the coming days to guide the alliance.

Addressing a press conference, the former Union minister said TMC, ever since the days of its founding by Moopanar, has had a "national outlook." The decision to join hands with BJP included issues like the welfare of Tamil Nadu and prosperous India. Vasan's announcement marks the first official tie-up BJP has managed to forge in Tamil Nadu ahead of the polls, amidst its attempts to create a grouping other than those headed by the ruling DMK and AIADMK.

Vasan also indicated that his party's slogan 'Prosperous Tamil Nadu, Strong India," was in tune with the Centre's various steps.He said TMC firmly believes that Tamil Nadu will pave the way for another "good regime" at the Centre under BJP. *—PTI*

EX-MLA AMONG 12 BOOKED IN INLD CHIEF'S MURDER

CHANDIGARH, 26 FEB

Police on Monday booked a former Haryana MLA Naresh Kaushik and 11 others in connection with the murder of Indian National Lok Dal's state unit president Nafe Singh Rathee and a party worker in Bahadurgarh near Delhi.Rathee and party worker Jai Kishan were shot dead by assailants on Sunday. Three private gunmen hired by former MLA Rathee for security were also injured in the attack.

Nafe Singh Rathee's family refused to cremate his body until those behind the murder were arrested.

The attack on INLD Haryana unit Chief came weeks before Lok Sabha elections, drawing sharp reactions from Opposition parties who alleged a breakdown in law and order in BJP-ruled state.

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar Sunday said that not a single culprit involved in this case will be spared. *—PTI*

AGAINST WTO

Farmers take out tractor rallies in Pb, H'yana, UP

CHANDIGARH / LUCKNOW, 26 FEB

Farmers took out tractor rallies at several places in Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh and burnt effigies, demanding the agriculture sector be taken out of the WTO agreement.

In Uttar Pradesh, the rallies led to disruption in traffic at many places and farmers also burnt effigies representing the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which is holding its 13th ministerial conference, a meeting of its highest decision-making body, in the UAE.

Farmer leaders claimed the WTO's objective was to end farm subsidies and if India followed it, that would be "suicidal".

In western Uttar Pradesh, protests by farmers with tractors and by burning effigies representing WTO following a call given by the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), disrupted vehicular traffic, which could resume only in the afternoon.

BKU national Spokesperson Rakesh Tikait alleged the Union government was ignoring the genuine demands of farmers and condemned the "atrocities" against farmers camping on the Punjab-Haryana border points to press the Centre for various demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) for crops.In UP's Muzaffarnagar district, a tractor march by farmers on a highway disrupted traffic in many places. The protesters parked their tractors at Bhuraheri under the Purkaji police station area, Bhangela under the Khatauli police station area, Mansoorpur intersection and Rampur Tiraha under the Chhapar police station area.

In Punjab's Hoshiarpur, farmers parked their tractors at several locations including the Jalandhar-Jammu National Highway. In Amritsar, farmers parked their vehicles along the highways in Ajnala, Jandiala Guru, Rayya and Beas. In Ludhiana, farmers owing allegiance to the SKM, parked their tractors along the highway on Ludhiana-Chandigarh road to register their protest against the WTO.

In Haryana's Hisar, farmers held protests at 50 locations by parking their tractors along the state and national highways.

Farmers also held a protest at the Bahadarabad toll plaza on the Haridwar-Delhi National Highway in Uttarakhand and sat on a day-long dharna causing inconvenience to commuters. *—PTI*

Farmers raise slogans during a tractor rally taken out in support of the farmers' protest, in Amritsar on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

10 years jail, ₹10 crore fine for unfair means in Assam exams

GUWAHATI, 26 FEB

Assam assembly on Monday passed a bill that proposes a punishment of up to 10 years in jail and a fine of up to Rs 10 crore on anyone found indulging in unfair means in recruitment examinations.

Assam Public Examination (Measures for Prevention of Unfair Means in Recruitment) Bill, 2024 was passed by a voice vote in the House on the last day of the Budget session.The bill, moved by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, will give full immunity to any government officer implementing the clauses in "good faith".It empowers the government to punish any person, indulging in any attempt to leak, produce, sell, print or solve question papers directly or indirectly to assist a candidate and hold tests in undesignated centres.

"Such a person will be imprisoned for a minimum of five years, extendable up to 10 years, and shall also be liable to be fined at least Rs 10 lakh, which can go up to Rs 10 crore," the bill said.

"...in case of default of payment of fine, such person shall also be liable to be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term of two years," it added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

6 labourers killed as bus hits tractor in UP

JAUNPUR, 26 FEB

Six labourers died when an Uttar Pradesh bus hit a tractor here, police said on Monday. The accident took place near the Samadhganj market in the Sikrara police station area around 11.30pm on Sunday, they said. An Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (UPSRTC) bus going from Prayagraj to Deoria hit a tractor carrying 12 labourers, killing six of them, said Additional Superintendent of Police (Rural) Shailendra Singh. Those who died in the accident were identified as Neeraj Saroj, 28, Rajesh Saroj, 45, Sangram Vishwakarma, 25, C Mushar, 20, Govind Bind, 30, and Atul Saroj, 30, all residents of Alishahpur village here, he said.—*PTI*

2 teachers booked over suicide of class 7 student in Kerala

ALAPPUZHA, 26 FEB

A case has been registered against two teachers of a government aided school in connection with the suicide of a class 7 student, who was found hanging in his home in this coastal district recently.The victim's family alleged that the boy took the extreme step on 15 February evening at home after being subjected to physical and mental torture by some teachers in the school.A police officer said the teachers were booked under IPC Section 324 (voluntarily causing hurt) and Section 75 of the Juvenile Justice Act which is non-bailable.As per the complaint of the parents, the teachers had beaten up their son with a cane in front of other students.

—*PTI*

2-year-old boy, father run over by train in Bihar

JEHANABAD, 26 FEB

A two-year-old boy and his father were run over by a train in Bihar's Jehanabad district, police said on Monday.The deceased, Shravan Kumar and his son Jacky, had on Sunday night left their home in Tenhta police station area to attend a wedding, Station House Officer DN Yadav said."A search operation was launched following complaints from family members that they had not reached the venue. Their mangled bodies were found on the tracks near the Tenhta railway station," Yadav said.The SHO said the child's father was wearing an earphone which, apparently, made him oblivious to the approaching train's sound.

The bodies have been sent for post-mortem.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Fire in slum colony in Thane; 35 huts gutted, none hurt

THANE, 26 FEB

At least 35 huts were destroyed when a fire broke out in a slum colony in Maharashtra's Thane district on Monday morning, an official said.No casualties were reported in the incident in the Circus Ground area of Ambernath town around 10am, said Yasin Tadvi, chief of the civic disaster management cell. The fire gutted 35 huts in the slum, but the residents were evacuated safely, he said. The blaze was put out in an hour, and the cooling operations are underway, the official said. The cause for the blaze is yet to be ascertained, he said.

—*PTI*

HC allows puja at Gyanvapi mosque

Puja was challenged by mosque panel

PRAYAGRAJ, 26 FEB

The district court had directed the local administration to make arrangements within seven days for prayers PHOTO: PTI

Worship will continue in the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, the Allahabad High Court said on Monday while dismissing an appeal that had challenged the district court's order to this effect. Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal dismissed the mosque management committee's appeal that had challenged the Varanasi district court's order allowing "puja" to be performed in the "Vyas Tehkhana" or southern cellar of the mosque.

The High Court dismissed two appeals filed by the Anjuman Intezamia Mosque Committee challenging the district judge's 17 January order that appointed the district magistrate as the receiver of the "Vyas Tehkhana" and 31 January order by which he allowed "puja" to be performed there.

The High Court said worship in the "Vyas Tehkhana" will continue.

The High Court judge had reserved his verdict in the matter on 15 February after hearing the counsel for the parties.

The Anjuman Intezamia Mosque Committee manages the affairs of the Gyanvapi mosque. It moved the high court on 2 February, hours after the Supreme Court refused to hear its plea against the district court order and asked it to approach the High Court.

The district court ruled on 31 January that a Hindu priest can perform prayers before the idols in the southern cellar of the mosque.

The district court had directed the local administration to make arrangements within seven days for prayers in the cellar. This would have involved "proper arrangements" with metal barricades at the complex. —*PTI*

FIGHTING FOR RIGHTS

STs issue notices to govt over plight of tribals in Sundarbans

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

The commission issued the notices last week following a representation from rights activist PHOTO: PTI

- The commission issued the notices last week following a representation from rights activist and Supreme Court lawyer Radhakanta Tripathy

National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has issued notices to Centre and West Bengal government, seeking factual and action-taken reports on the issues of child marriage, human trafficking, human-wildlife conflict, and corruption plaguing the state's Sundarbans region.

The commission issued the notices last week following a representation from rights activist and Supreme Court lawyer Radhakanta Tripathy.

The tribal population (2, 11,927) in the region, comprising primarily Munda, Santhal, Bhumij, and Oraon tribes, remains marginalised despite being the earliest settlers, Tripathy said in his representation to National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST).

He highlighted that child marriages were prevalent in Sundarbans, a cluster of low-lying islands in Bay of Bengal famous for its unique mangrove forests.

It is common for girls to marry at 15-16 years. Around 15 cases of underage marriages are reported annually in the Hasnabad panchayat, Tripathy said, adding that conservative attitudes contribute to the high rate of child marriages.

Human trafficking is a major concern, with West Bengal ranking second in the number of missing women and girls, the activist said.

According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 1, 56,905 women and 36,606 girls were reported missing in the state in 2019-20.

The rights activists said the struggle for survival of indigenous people in Indian Sundarbans, home to over 100 tigers, is intensified by environmental challenges, leading to human-animal conflicts and hardships for affected families.Tripathy also alleged that the residents of Sundarban lack access to essential services such as safe drinking water, healthcare, education, and proper infrastructure, violating their right to life and basic amenities. —*PTI*

Internet suspension in Churachandpur extended for 5 days

IMPHAL, 26 FEB

Manipur government has extended internet suspension including mobile data services in Churachandpur district for another five days till 2 March in "view of the prevailing law and order situation" in the district.

A Home Department order issued on Sunday evening said the "state government after reviewing the prevailing law and order situation in Churachandpur district decided to continue suspension of internet services, mobile data services, and internet services through VPN throughout the whole revenue jurisdiction of Churachandpur district till 2 March.

The state government on 16 February ordered temporary suspension of internet services in Churachandpur district for five days after a mob entered the district office complexes of the Superintendent of Police and Deputy Commissioner and engaged in vandalism and torched government properties.

Two people were killed in a clash with security forces when a mob barged into the mini-secretariat to protest the suspension of a head constable after a purported video of him with armed miscreants went viral on social media. —*PTI*

25-YR-OLD ATTACKED

Rajasthan: Rape survivor shot by rapist, 3 arrested

JAIPUR, 26 FEB

- The woman's brother was also injured in the attack and the two are undergoing treatment at Sawai Man Singh Hospital

A 25-year-old rape survivor was seriously injured when she was shot at and attacked with a sharp-edged weapon by a man accused of raping her and his accomplices in Kotputli-Behror district of Rajasthan, on Monday.

The woman's brother was also injured in the attack and the two are undergoing treatment at Sawai Man Singh Hospital here.

The main accused Rajendra Yadav was caught on Monday after his leg got amputated after being hit by a train in Jaipur, DGP UR Sahoo said.

On Saturday night, the woman was returning home on a two-wheeler with her brother when Yadav and two others, Mahipal Gujral and Rahul Gujral, attacked them near Pragpura police station. The accused followed the siblings before attacking them, police said.

Yadav shot the woman in the back while the other two accused stabbed her and her brother with a sharp-edged weapon. The woman sustained multiple injuries in the head, legs, hands, and shoulders, they said.

An FIR has been registered in the matter based on a complaint lodged by the woman's family.

According to the FIR, Yadav allegedly raped the woman on 16 January last year and was subsequently arrested and fired from his job.

He recently came out on bail and started threatening the woman to withdraw the case against him. Yadav attacked her as she did not withdraw the case, the FIR stated.FIR against the accused has been registered under sections 307 (attempt to murder), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), and 506 (criminal intimidation) of Indian Penal Code and provisions of the Arms Act. —*PTI*

Annulling of electoral bonds will lead to greater transparency: Amartya

KOLKATA, 26 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Eminent economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen on Monday welcomed Supreme Court's recent judgment annulling the electoral bonds scheme, denouncing it as a scandal.

"Electoral bonds were a scandal, and I am glad that they have now been dropped. I hope there will be more transparency in the support that people give to each other in the electoral context," Sen said.In a landmark judgment, Supreme Court annulled the electoral bonds scheme earlier this month, citing violations of Constitutional rights to freedom of speech and expression, as well as the right to information.

The apex court directed State Bank of India (SBI) to disclose details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties to the Election Commission. This information should include the date of encashment and the denomination of the bonds and be submitted to the poll panel by 6 March.According to Sen, India's electoral system has been significantly affected by the nature of politics, making it difficult for the common people. —*PTI*

ICICI Bank manager dupes woman of ₹16 crore

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Shveta Sharma PHOTO: BBC

An Indian woman has accused a manager at one of the country's largest banks of defrauding her by siphoning off Rs 16 crore from her account.

Shveta Sharma says she had transferred money to the ICICI Bank from her US account, expecting it to be invested in fixed deposits.

But she alleges that a bank official created "fake accounts, forged her signature, took out debit cards and cheque books in her name" to withdraw money from her accounts.

"He gave me fake statements, created a fake email ID in my name and manipulated my mobile number in the bank records so I won't get any withdrawal notifications," she told the BBC.

A spokesman for the bank admitted to the BBC that "indeed the fraud had happened" but said that the ICICI "is a bank of repute which holds trillions of rupees in deposits from millions of customers"."Whoever is involved will be punished," he added. As the interest rate on bank deposits in the US was negligible, he advised Sharma to move her money to India where fixed deposits were offering an interest of 5.5 per cent to 6 per cent.She opened an NRE account meant for non-resident Indians on his advice after visiting the ICICI's branch in old Gurugram near the capital, Delhi, and in 2019, began transferring money into it from her US account."Over a period of four years from September 2019 to December 2023, we deposited our entire life savings of around 13 crore rupees," she said, that ", the sum would have grown to more than 16 crore rupees". The fraud came to light in early January when a new employee at the bank offered to get Sharma better returns on her money. It was then that she discovered that all her fixed deposits had vanished. —*BBC News*

SC junks PIL challenging three new criminal laws

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a challenge to the three new criminal laws, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Act, which will come into effect from 1 July.

Taking note of the Public Interest litigation (PIL) filed by Chennai resident T Sivagnanasambandan, a bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra dismissed it on ground of locus.

"Who are you to challenge the new criminal laws? You have no locus standi (a right to be heard)," the Chief Justice of India (CJI) said while dismissing the Public Interest Litigation (PIL).

The PIL had made the Union ministries

The three laws, which replace the colonial era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872, got Parliament's approval on 21 December last year and presidential assent on 25 December. —*PTI*

No 'default bail' to rape accused govt officer

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Delhi High Court on Monday refused to grant "default bail" to suspended Delhi government officer Premoday Khakha, who allegedly raped a minor girl several times and impregnated her.

Khakha assailed a trial court order denying him the relief of statutory bail as he contended that the charge sheet filed in the case was based on an incomplete investigation.

His wife also sought a default bail before the high court in the case and a similar order was passed on her plea as well.

Rejecting the bail pleas, Justice Jyoti Singh said there was no infirmity in the trial court order and a substantial investigation was done by the police before filing the charge sheet within the stipulated time.As per the Code of Criminal Procedure, an accused is entitled to default bail if the investigating agency fails to file a charge sheet before the court concerned within the stipulated time. The time frame depends on the offenses invoked and was 60 days in this case.

The official's wife Seema Rani is also an accused in the case.

She allegedly gave the girl medicines to terminate her pregnancy. —*PTI*

NO VISITS ALLOWED AT JAMIA

Kashmir observes Shab-e-Barat prayers

SRINAGAR, 26 FEB

Devotees thronged mosques and shrines on Sunday night to pray and participate in Quran recitations PHOTO: PTI

Shab-e-Barat was observed across the Kashmir valley with night-long prayers at major mosques and shrines, even as no congregation was allowed at the historic Jamia Masjid here, officials said on Monday.

Devotees thronged mosques and shrines on Sunday night to pray and participate in Quran recitations while preachers and religious scholars highlighted the importance of the night and the teachings of Islam.

The biggest congregation was held at the Hazratbal shrine which houses the holy relic of Prophet Mohammad.However, no prayers were allowed at the Jamia Masjid in the Nowhatta area of the city here, the officials said.

Anjuman Auqaf Jamia Masjid, the managing body of the grand mosque, said night prayers were not allowed at the mosque and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq was put under house arrest.

"Once again, the gates of Jamia Masjid Srinagar were forcibly closed by the authorities on the auspicious occasion of Shab-e-Barat while Mirwaiz Umar Farooq (was) put under house arrest, hence disallowing congregational prayers on Shab Baraat at Jamia Masjid," the Anjuman said in a statement. —*PTI*

Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid declares son 'successor'

New Delhi, 26 Feb

Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid Syed Ahmed Bukhari declared his son Syed Shaban Bukhari his "successor" at a 'dastarbandi' (investiture) ceremony held in the courtyard of the grand mosque.

In his address before making the formal declaration at the ceremony on Sunday, Syed Ahmed Bukhari traced the history of the mosque and said the first Shahi Imam was appointed by Emperor Shah Jehan.

He said the first Imam of the Jama Masjid (Hazrat Syed Abdul Ghafoor Shah Bukhari) was appointed as the Shahi Imam at the age of 63. As per tradition, Imams have declared their successors in their lifetimes.

—*PTI*

IIT-Madras makes AI to determine age of foetus

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Researchers at Indian Institute of Technology Madras have developed the first India-specific artificial intelligence (AI) model to precisely determine the age of a foetus in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

The team, including researchers from Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI), Faridabad, noted that accurate age of foetus or 'gestational age' (GA) is necessary for the appropriate care of pregnant women and for determining precise delivery dates.

Called 'Garbhini-GA2', this is the first late-trimester GA estimation model to be developed and validated using Indian population data."We are utilising advanced data science and AI/ML (artificial intelligence/machine learning) techniques to build tools to predict unfavourable birth outcomes," said Himanshu Sinha from IIT Madras.

"The first step towards this is to develop accurate GA models that perform significantly better than currently used models designed using Western populations," said Sinha, who led the research published in the journal Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia.'Garbhini-GA2' model accurately estimates the age of a foetus for the Indian population, reducing error by almost three times, they said.The researchers used genetic algorithm-based methods to develop Garbhini-GA2, which, when applied in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy, was more accurate than the current models. —*PTI*

LONG WAIT FOR FOOD

Palestinians wait for humanitarian aid on a beach in Gaza City, Gaza Strip. The situation in Rafah, where dense tent camps have sprouted to house the displaced, has sparked global concern and Israel's allies have warned that it must protect civilians in its battle against Hamas
PHOTO: PTI

Indians in search of jobs duped to fight for Russia

According to Russian defence ministry, the actual number recruited in the past year is approximately 100 ***PHOTO: EPA***

At least a dozen Indians have been duped by agents into fighting for Russian forces in the country's war with Ukraine with reports saying one of them was killed in a missile strike.

Hemal Ashwinbhai from Gujarat died in a missile attack last week The Hindu newspaper reported over the weekend. Hemal's father had said on 23 February that he spoke to his son three days ago. He said that he was posted 20-22km inside Ukraine's border and called him every few days when he got access to the mobile network.

The duped men, aged between 22 and 31 and hired as "helpers in the military establishment in Russia," were allegedly sent to the battlefield under the pretext of "training," according to their families.

Indian sources in Russia suggest dozens of Indians have joined the Russian army. However, a Russian defence ministry source informed The Hindu that the actual number recruited in the past year is approximately 100. India's foreign ministry has acknowledged "that some Indian nationals have enlisted for support roles with the Russian army".

A man from Uttar Pradesh says he was recruited through a social media platform

"Each and every such case brought to the attention of the Indian Embassy in Moscow has been strongly taken up with the Russian authorities and those brought to the attention of the ministry have been taken up with the Russian Embassy in New Delhi. Several Indians have already been discharged as a result," the ministry said in a statement.

Videos of some of the men, explaining how they were tricked by agents and sent to the battlefield have shocked their families, all of whom are poor - their parents and siblings are either tuk-tuk drivers, tea sellers or handcart sellers.

Victims and families allege agents demanded Rs 300,000 promising a Russian passport after a few months of army service. Agents reportedly recruit people from India, UAE, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, with fees reaching up to 1.2 million rupees.

"My 28-year-old son worked in a packaging company in Dubai. He, along with three friends, saw an agent's video offering jobs in Russia with a promised salary of Rs 90,000 to 100,000, compared to their current earnings of Rs 35,000 to 40,000. They paid the agent 300,000 rupees through loans. Please help bring my son back," his father, who sells tea and eggs on a handcart in Karnataka said. His story mirrors those of others from the states of Telangana, Gujarat, Kashmir, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, all allegedly deceived. Only one person has successfully escaped Moscow and returned home.

One man from Uttar Pradesh speaking from a safe location in Moscow in a video shot in end-January said that they were "were brought here by BabaVlog [a YouTube channel run by an Indian], and promised a salary of Rs 150,000 [a month]. We were not told that we are being drafted in an army." Those allegedly deceived lack war combat experience with one man from Uttar Pradesh, dressed in army fatigues, stating in a video message that he was recruited through a social media platform.

"In Moscow, we signed a contract in Russian and unwittingly became soldiers sent to fight in the war. We've been deceived," says the man, claiming that he and two other Indians have suffered combat injuries, gesturing with his seemingly injured right hand.

"Please get us out of this place. Otherwise, they will send us to the front. There is artillery [fire] and drones falling all over. We have zero experience in fighting a war. The agents have put us in this fix," he adds.

Speaking over the phone from the Russia-Ukraine border, a man from Kashmir reported being stranded in Mariupol in Ukraine with an Indian companion and nine people from Nepal and Cuba. He said he had injured his foot during training.The brother of one of the men said he didn't know whether the Indians were "in the Wagner private army or the Russian army. They're some 40km from the Ukraine border. They've been promised Russian citizenship in three months".

The issue made headlines after Asaduddin Owaisi, MP from Hyderabad, raised it. On 23 January, he wrote to the foreign ministry, seeking government intervention to bring the men back home.

Mallikarjun Kharge, leader of India's main opposition Congress party, alleged that some 100 Indians have been "recruited in the Russian army as helpers" in the past year.

"Shockingly, some of them been forced to fight alongside Russia's forces on the Russia-Ukraine border. Some of the workers have also said that their passports and documents had been seized, leaving them stranded and rendering them incapable to return home," he said.

When the war began in 2022, there were some reports of a few Indians volunteering to join the Ukrainian army. But the presence of Indians on the Russian side in combat roles has been reported for the first time.

—BBC News

SALAR ساڈھ

New waste management tech to improve rural life

The research also lays out a series of recommendations for maximising the system's economic viability ***PHOTO: PTI***

Pyrolysis is a kind of chemical recycling that turns leftover organic materials into their component molecules. It works by sealing the waste inside an oxygen-free chamber and heating it to more than 400 degrees Celsius, producing useful chemicals in the process.

In the paper, the researchers from the University of Glasgow in the UK outlined how three products of pyrolysis -- bio-oil, syngas and biochar fertiliser -- could help villagers live healthier and greener lives with more productive farmland.

The research also lays out a series of recommendations for maximising the system's economic viability.

The project began with a survey of nearly 1,200 rural households across Odisha, investigating their experiences of cooking, powering their homes, and farming.

Over 80 per cent of those surveyed wanted to switch from cooking indoors with smoke-producing coal to cleaner options, and access to reliable grid electricity was a priority for almost all respondents.

About 90 per cent said they would be willing to sell agricultural waste to support bioenergy, the researchers found.

The feedback helped inform the team's design for a community-level pyrolysis system called "BioTRIG" which would run on waste and provide a series of benefits for rural communities who live below the poverty line.

The syngas and bio-oil would help heat and power the pyrolosis system in future cycles, with surplus electricity used to power local homes and businesses, the researchers said.

The clean-burning bio-oil could also be used to replace dirty cooking fuels in homes, and biochar could be used to store carbon while improving soil fertility, they said.

- The clean-burning bio-oil could also be used to replace dirty cooking fuels in homes, and biochar could be used to store carbon while improving soil fertility, they said. Computer simulations of how effective the BioTRIG system could be in real-world applications showed that it could help drop greenhouse gas emissions from communities by nearly 350 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per capita per annum

Computer simulations of how effective the BioTRIG system could be in real-world applications showed that it could help drop greenhouse gas emissions from communities by nearly 350 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per capita per annum.

"Indoor air pollution is a serious issue in rural India, where cooking with fossil fuels in unventilated residences disproportionately affects the health of women and children," said Siming You from the University of Glasgow.

"These communities are also faced with the degradation of arable land from unsustainable farming practices, and access to reliable electricity is an ongoing challenge," said You, who led the project.

The researchers noted that all these problems have been identified by the UN as targets for international sustainable development goals, and the Indian government has already taken steps to begin addressing them across the country.

The BioTRIG system has the potential to help address all of these serious problems with a trigeneration approach to turning otherwise unusable waste into three useful sources of bioenergy.

Scaled across a nation the size of India, even a modest uptake of the system could have a big impact on climate emissions and public health," You added.

—PTI

The project began with a survey of nearly 1,200 rural households across Odisha, investigating their experiences of cooking, powering their homes, and farming ***PHOTO: ANI***

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Amid war, Israel steps up demolitions of Palestinian homes

The legal discrimination has forced Palestinians to build without permits, rendering 28 per cent of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem 'illegal' ***PHOTO: PTI***

Fakhri Abu Diab had no time to pack his belongings when the Israeli authorities arrived on his doorstep in occupied East Jerusalem on 14 February. Police first evicted his family and then ordered a bulldozer to demolish his home.

"All of my memories were in that house," said Abu Diab, 62, who was born and raised in that home. "I even had a picture of my mother holding me as a child. It was hanging on our wall, but now it's gone."

In the wake of Israel's devastating war on Gaza, the Jerusalem municipality has stepped up home demolitions on the east side of the city, which Israel annexed from the occupied West Bank in 1967 and where most of Jerusalem's 362,000 Palestinians live.

During the first nine months of 2023, Israel demolished a total of 97 Palestinian homes. But 87 homes have been bulldozed in East Jerusalem since Hamas's deadly attack on Israeli communities and military outposts in southern Israel on 7 October last year, according to Ir Amim, a local non-profit which monitors home demolitions and advocates for Palestinian rights.

The acute uptick in demolitions suggests that Jerusalem's municipality is exploiting the global attention on Gaza, where nearly 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, to try and uproot more Palestinians from East Jerusalem, activists and experts say.

Israel justifies demolishing Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem by claiming that they have been built without permits. The municipality typically only allows majority Jewish neighbourhoods to build new homes.

The legal discrimination has forced Palestinians to build without permits, rendering 28 percent of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem "illegal".

The Israeli authorities have issued orders to demolish most of them, according to Daniel Seidemann, an Israeli lawyer who specialises in legal and public issues in East Jerusalem.

"Before the war, there were roughly 20,000 outstanding demolition orders and those orders never expire," Seidemann told Al Jazeera.

Home demolitions are prohibited under international law unless they are necessary for military operations. But Omar Shakir, the Israel-Palestine director of Human Rights Watch, said that Israel has created a legal structure to allow it to demolish Palestinian homes.

"There are different mechanisms (to enforce demolitions), each of which ultimately furthers the same objective of forcing Palestinians off their land and maximising land for Jewish Israelis," he told Al Jazeera.

Sending a message

The demolition of Abu Diab's home has compounded this fear, experts and activists say.

Abu Diab, is, himself, a human rights activist and the elected spokesperson of Silwan, a district that represents about 60,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem. Residents trust him to speak out against home demolitions and other forms of systemic discrimination that Palestinians face from the Israeli occupying authorities.

"I asked Abu Diab after [Israel] demolished his house if he would stop speaking out. He said, 'I'll speak out even more now,'" Godfrey-Goldstein said. Palestinian and Israeli activists believe that advocacy to protect Palestinian homes is needed now more than ever. With municipal elections approaching on 27 February, Abu Diab believes that candidates may be deliberately calling to demolish more homes to appeal to their constituents.

He said he fears that the far-right candidate, Arieh King, who is currently deputy mayor of Jerusalem, could become the next mayor. King has previously stated that he aims to limit the building of Palestinian homes in order to protect Israel's character as a Jewish state. In December, he posted on X, calling Palestinians "subhuman".

"If King becomes the next mayor in the coming elections, the situation will become quite difficult. He has openly threatened to demolish Palestinian homes and kill Palestinians," said Abu Diab.

'There will be a reaction'

Abu Diab said that he owes his life to Godfrey-Goldstein and other activists for quickly notifying journalists and human rights organisations when the police stormed his home. He believes the police may have seriously injured or killed him had it not been for those arriving to video the demolition.

"My wife was sleeping when about 20 or 30 officers stormed in. We are traumatised from what we experienced," he told Al Jazeera.

But while Abu Diab survived, he and his family – children and grandchildren – are now homeless.

He told Al Jazeera that he is sleeping in the homes of friends and relatives in his community, often moving from one residence to another.

Abu Diab is also concerned that he may not be able to afford the demolition. Israeli authorities typically require Palestinian residents to pay for the bulldozing of their homes as well as the salaries of police officers who are deployed to evict residents and secure the premises.

Abu Diab expects the total bill to amount to $20,000 or $30,000.

However, his immediate priority is to try and find a new home for his grandchildren, who are too young to understand why they are homeless.

Although he's trying to remain strong for his family, Abu Diab worries about the future, and warned that Palestinians in East Jerusalem will eventually erupt in anger if Israeli authorities continue to step up home demolitions.

"There will be a reaction," he told Al Jazeera. "People can't stand this for long."

Courtesy, Al-Jazeera

Last time food delivered to Gaza was 23 Jan

Human Rights Watch says Israel has failed to comply with UN court's order to provide needed aid in Gaza

UN says at least 5,00,000 people are facing famine while entire population of Gaza at 2.3 million, is experiencing acute food shortage **PHOTO: ANADOLU**

RAFAH, 26 FEB

Israel has failed to comply with an order by the United Nations' top court to provide urgently needed aid to desperate people in the Gaza Strip, Human Rights Watch said Monday, a month after a landmark ruling in The Hague ordered Israel to moderate its war.

In a preliminary response to a South African petition accusing Israel of genocide, the UN's top court ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza.

It stopped short of ordering an end to its military offensive that has triggered a humanitarian catastrophe in the tiny Palestinian enclave. Israel vehemently denies the charges against it, saying it is fighting a war in self-defence.

- One month later and nearly five months into the war, preparations are underway for Israel to expand its ground operation into Rafah, Gaza's southernmost town along the border with Egypt

One month later and nearly five months into the war, preparations are underway for Israel to expand its ground operation into Rafah, Gaza's southernmost town along the border with Egypt, where 1.4 million Palestinians have flooded into in search of safety.

Early Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the army had presented to the War Cabinet its operational plan for Rafah as well as plans to evacuate civilians from the battle zones. It gave no further details.

The situation in Rafah, where dense tent camps have sprouted to house the displaced, has sparked global concern and Israel's allies have warned that it must protect civilians in its battle against Hamas

—AP

Houthi attacks disrupting business, say UK exporters

LONDON, 26 FEB

More than half of exporters in the United Kingdom have been disrupted by attacks carried out by Yemen's Houthis in the Red Sea, according to a survey by an influential business group. According to the survey by the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), 55 per cent of exporters reported higher shipping costs and delays, as did 53 per cent of manufacturers and business-to-consumer services firms. Among all types of businesses, 37 per cent of companies were affected by the attacks, according to a survey of 1,000 firmsbetween 15 January and 9 February. Some businesses surveyed said container hire costs had jumped as much as fourfold, while delivery times had blown out by up to four weeks. "There has been spare capacity in the shipping-freight industry to respond to the difficulties, which has bought us some time," William Bain, BCC head said. *—Al Jazeera*

Japan moon lander survives lunar night

TOKYO, 26 FEB

Japan's Moon lander has survived the harsh lunar night, the sunless and freezing equivalent to two Earth weeks. "Last night, a command was sent to #SLIM and a response received," national space agency Jaxa said on X. The craft was put into sleep mode after an awkward landing in January left its solar panels facing the wrong way and unable to generate power. A change in sunlight direction later allowed it to send pictures back but it shut down again as lunar night fell. Jaxa said at the time that Slim (Smart Lander for Investigating Moon) was not designed for the harsh lunar nights. It said it planned to try to operate again from mid-February, when the Sun would shine again on Slim's solar cells. ***—BBC News***

PHOTO: X

'Captain Marvel' actor Kenneth Mitchell dies due to ALS

LOS ANGELES, 26 FEB

Actor Kenneth Mitchell, best known for his role in 'Captain Marvel', has died. As per The Hollywood Reporter, Mitchell died on Saturday in Los Angeles from complications of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). He was 49. Sharing the news of Mitchell's demise, his family said, "Kenny was the keeper of countless enduring friendships. Like a massive star exploding with kindness, pureness and a particular brand of silly, you were pulled right into his orbit. Once captured, Kenny could bathe you in positivity, compassion, thoughtfulness, and hilarity, and make you feel so loved." Mitchell was diagnosed with ALS in 2018. He spoke about the diagnosis in a 2020 interview with People, where he said that "the moment that they told us it was [ALS], it was like I was in my own movie." ***—ANI***

Bangladesh bans adopting elephants from wild

DHAKA, 26 FEB

Bangladesh's critically endangered wild elephants have received a court order banning their adoption and protecting them from exploitation. Animal rights groups welcomed the High Court suspension of all licences, so young Asian elephants can no longer be captured and taken into captivity. Some of the animals have been used for begging, circuses or street shows. There are now only about 200 of the elephants in Bangladesh, with about half of those living in captivity. The country used to be one of the major homes for the Asian elephant but poaching and habitat loss has caused a marked decrease in their numbers. Under the previous scheme, young elephants could be taken into captivity where the forestry department issued licenses to logging groups who would use the animals to haul logs. ***—BBC News***

Children search for food to keep families alive

PALESTINE, 26 FEB

In certain places at certain times, just staying alive is something for a boy to be proud of - let alone going out every day to find the food that keeps your family from starving. Every morning, Mohammed Zo'rab, 11, goes out into the southern Gaza city of Rafah on a mission. He takes a big plastic bowl and heads to schools that have become refugee centres, and to makeshift camps on the roadside where people suffer like his own family but might still find something to feed the child of strangers.

Mohammed also goes to hospitals where the wounded arrive at all hours, and anywhere else where there might be a pot boiling over an open fire. —BBC News

Palestinian PM resigns, cites 'genocide'

PALESTINIAN, 26 FEB

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh has announced the resignation of his government, which rules parts of the occupied West Bank, due to the escalating violence in the occupied territory and the war on Gaza.

"The decision to resign came in light of the unprecedented escalation in the West Bank and Jerusalem and the war, genocide and starvation in the Gaza Strip," said Shtayyeh, who submitted his resignation to Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas on Monday.

"I see that the next stage and its challenges require new governmental and political arrangements that take into account the new reality in Gaza and the need for a Palestinian-Palestinian consensus based on Palestinian unity and the extension of unity of authority over the land of Palestine," he said.

Shtayyeh **PHOTO: PTI**

Shtayyeh's comments come as US pressure grows on Abbas to shake up the PA and begin work on a political structure that can govern a Palestinian state following the war. However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has on numerous occasions rejected calls for the PA under Abbas to take control of a Palestinian state and govern Gaza.

Israeli lawmakers backed Netanyahu's rejection of any "unilateral" recognition of a Palestinian state. But the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs slammed the vote and accused Israel of holding the rights of Palestinians hostage due to the occupation of Palestinian territories. *—Al Jazeera*

Israeli forces kill 30 Hamas terrorists

TEL AVIV, 26 FEB

Israeli soldiers killed more than 30 Hamas terrorists in the Zeitoun area of Gaza City during the past day, the Israel Defence Forces said on Monday morning. The terrorists were eliminated as Israel's 401st Armoured Brigade consolidated its control over the area. —ANI

US airman sets himself on fire outside embassy

WASHINGTON, 26 FEB

An active-duty member of the United States Air Force attempted self-immolation and yelled, "Free Palestine," outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC, on 25 February, according to the Air Force and local officials, reported by CNN.

—ANI

Taliban holds another public execution in stadium

ISLAMABAD, 26 FEB

The Taliban held a public execution on Monday of a man convicted of murder in northern Afghanistan as thousands watched at a sports stadium, the third such death sentence to be carried out in the past five days.

The execution took place in heavy showfall in the city of Shibirghan, the capital of northern Jawzjan province, where the brother of the murdered man shot the convict five times with a rifle, according to an eyewitness.

Security around the stadium was tight, said the witness, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to talk to the media.

It was also the fifth public execution since the Taliban seized power of Afghanistan in August 2021 as the US and NATO troops were in the final weeks of their withdrawal from the country after two decades of war.

This is the third such death sentence to be carried out in the past five days **PHOTO: PTI**

The development was ominous as the Taliban, despite initial promises of a more moderate rule, began carrying out severe punishments in public — executions, floggings and stonings — shortly after coming to power. The punishments are similar to those under their previous rule of Afghanistan in the late 1990s. Taliban government officials were not immediately available for comment.

The statement said Monday's death sentence was carried out following approval by three of the country's highest courts and the Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada. The executed man, identified as Nazar Mohammad from the district of Bilcheragh in Faryab province, had killed Khal Mohammad, also from Faryab. The killing took place in Jawzjan.

—AP

Ramaswamy, Noem eye Trump VP

WASHINGTON, 26 FEB

As former president of US Donald Trump looks set to secure a third presidential nomination from the Republican Party, a straw poll at a prominent gathering of conservative activists has shown that South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem and Indian-origin biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy were tied for the top choice to be the former US president's running mate, according to media reports.

The straw poll, at the Conservative Political Action Conference or CPAC, announced at the end of the four-day gathering outside Washington on Saturday said that Noem and Ramaswamy each garnered 15 per cent of the vote in the straw poll, The New York Times reported.

Ramaswamy, who was born in Cincinnati to Indian immigrant parents, ran for the Republican presidential nomination this year but dropped out of the race after finishing fourth in January's Iowa caucuses. He then withdrew from the race and backed Trump.

Noem, 52, became the first woman governor of South Dakota when she was elected in 2018, endorsed by Trump. During the Covid pandemic, she rose to national prominence over her refusal to issue statewide mandates for vaccinations and wearing face masks.

It was the first time in years that a question about whom Republicans should pick for vice president had overshadowed one about the presidential nominee in the survey of attendees, the NYT report said.

—PTI

Burkina Faso: 15 killed in attack on church

OUAGADOUGOU, 26 FEB

A village in Burkina Faso's conflict-ridden northern region witnessed a brutal attack, which claimed the lives of at least 15 Catholic worshippers as they gathered for mass at a church, Al Jazeera reported.

Abbot Jean-Pierre Sawadogo, the vicar-general of the Catholic Diocese of Dori, where the attack occurred on Sunday, described the incident as a "terrorist attack." The assailants struck the village of Essakane, leaving 12 attendees dead at the scene, while three others succumbed to their injuries during medical treatment. Two additional individuals sustained injuries in the attack.

- The assailants struck the village of Essakane, leaving 12 attendees dead at the scene, while three others succumbed to their injuries during medical treatment. Two additional individuals sustained injuries in the attack

Despite the tragic event, there was no immediate claim of responsibility for the shooting, as reported by Al Jazeera. Abbot Jean-Pierre Sawadogo urged for prayers, stating, "In this painful circumstance, we invite you to pray for the rest in God for those who have died in faith, for the healing of the wounded and ... for the conversion of those who continue to sow death and desolation in our country." *—PTI*

BECOMES 1ST WOMAN CM

Pakistan: Maryam Nawaz takes oath as Punjab Chief Minister

LAHORE, 26 FEB

Senior PML-N leader Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, on Monday, became the first-ever woman chief minister of a province in Pakistan when she was elected to head the Punjab province, describing it as an 'honour' for every woman in the country.

Maryam, 50, senior Vice President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, won the Chief Ministerial elections amidst a walkout by lawmakers of former prime minister Imran Khan's party-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC). In her maiden speech she took oath as the Punjab Chief Minister at a ceremony at the Governor House in the presence of her father Nawaz Sharif and uncle Shehbaz Sharif.

Maryam said that she was happy to sit in the seat where her father used to sit. "My father trained me how to run the office," Maryam, considered the political heir of Nawaz Sharif, said. PML-N leader said she had seen hard times like imprisonment but was thankful to her opponents for making her strong. "But I will not seek revenge," she said.

Maryam Nawaz **PHOTO: PTI**

- Maryam, 50, senior Vice President of PMLN, won the Chief Ministerial elections amidst a walkout by lawmakers of former prime minister Imran Khan's party-backed SIC

Maryam received 220 votes and won the chief ministerial elections for the politically crucial Punjab province, home to 120 million people. She defeated Rana Aftab of the PTI-backed SIC, who received no votes as his party boycotted the election.

"The votes have been counted according to which Maryam has obtained 220 votes, and SIC candidate Rana Aftab Aftab secured zero votes," said newly-elected Speaker Malik Ahmad Khan while presiding over the session.

To win the chief minister's election, a candidate needs to win the backing of the majority, which is 187 members in the House that currently has 327 seats, according to Geo News. The newly-elected chief minister, Maryam, enjoyed the support of the majority in the House. *—PTI*

Pak woman in Arabic script dress saved from mob

ISLAMABAD, 26 FEB

An angry mob in Pakistan accused a woman who wore a dress adorned with Arabic calligraphy of blasphemy, after mistaking them for Quran verses.

She was saved by police who escorted her to safety after hundreds gathered. She later gave a public apology. The dress has the word "Halwa" printed in Arabic letters on it, meaning sweet in Arabic. Blasphemy is punishable by death in Pakistan. Some people have been lynched even before their cases go on trial.

Police said they first received a call at around 13:10 local on Sunday that a crowd had gathered around a woman at a restaurant in Lahore. Around 300 people had crowded outside the restaurant by the time they arrived, said Assistant Superintendent Syeda Shehrbano.

Videos showing a woman, visibly scared, sitting in the far corner of the restaurant, shielding her face with her hand. In another, she is surrounded by officers, who had formed the only barrier between her and a growing crowd who were shouting for her to remove the shirt. In some videos, people can be heard chanting that those who blaspheme must be beheaded. *—BBC News*

PTI nominates Gohar as chairman

ISLAMABAD, 26 FEB

Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party has once again tapped Barrister Gohar Khan as its chairman, in a U-turn from its earlier decision nominating Barrister Ali Zafar for the top post, a media report said on Monday.

Barrister Gohar, 45, was elected as the 71-year-old Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman after it held an intra-party poll in December last year on the directions of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). However, its result, which some disgruntled PTI workers challenged, was annulled after a bitter court battle.

Subsequently, the party was deprived of its iconic cricket bat symbol by the top electoral body, and Gohar, who became the chairman after those elections, was no longer the party head. Last week, Gohar announced that the party's next chairman nominee is Barrister Ali Zafar, and its internal elections are scheduled for 3 March.

Quoting party sources, the Dawn newspaper said that while Zafar refused to accept the chairmanship, the deadline to submit nomination papers ended at 3 pm on Sunday, and only Gohar submitted his candidature for the top post.

Subsequently, the former ruling party nominated Gohar for its top position, the report said. *—PTI*

2 YEARS OF WAR

Balkan countries remain divided over Ukraine war

ROGACA/ SEOUL, 26 FEB

When Elena Koposova signed an open letter against Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, she didn't expect a backlash in her newly adopted home state of Serbia.

After all, Serbia is formally seeking to join the European Union while adopting all the democratic values that go along with the membership, she thought. Now, she sees she was wrong.

Two years after signing the letter, the 54-year-old Russian woman is appealing an expulsion order after she was declared a threat to the national security of Serbia and her residency permit was revoked. The beleaguered literature translator said the only reason she could think of is the anti-war petition that she had signed.

Serbia is formally seeking to join the European Union **PHOTO: X/ STEPHANISRAEL**

Koposova is not alone. Serbia opened its borders in recent years to tens of thousands of Russians fleeing the government of President Vladimir Putin and the war in Ukraine. Russian pro-democracy activists in the Balkan country now say at least a dozen recently faced entry bans or had their residency permits revoked on grounds that they pose a threat to Serbia's security.

South Korea witnesses surge in Russian asylum seekers

South Korean authorities have reported a remarkable increase in Russians seeking asylum in the country, marking a significant surge in applications last year, as reported by CNN.

- The number of Russian nationals seeking asylum in South Korea soared fivefold in 2023, reaching a total of 5,750 applicants, a stark contrast to the 1,038 applicants in 2022

According to the Korean Immigration Service, the number of Russian nationals seeking asylum in South Korea soared fivefold in 2023, reaching a total of 5,750 applicants, a stark contrast to the 1,038 applicants in 2022.

The arrival of Russian asylum seekers has made them the largest group seeking refuge in South Korea, surpassing the cumulative asylum applications recorded from Russians between 1994 and 2019.

According to CNN, 2023 also witnessed the highest number of overall asylum applications in the past eight years, as disclosed by the Immigration Service. Following Russians, the largest groups of asylum seekers hail from Kazakhstan, China, and Malaysia. This trend persisted into the current year, with Russians constituting the largest group seeking asylum in January.

Reasons cited by asylum seekers predominantly include persecution based on religion and political beliefs, alongside discrimination based on social group, race, or nationality.

—AP/ANI

Gold slips ₹100; silver declines ₹400

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Gold prices slipped Rs 100 to Rs 62,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid a fall in the precious metal's prices in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities.The yellow metal had settled at Rs 63,050 per 10 grams in the previous trade.Silver also declined Rs 400 to Rs 74,600 per kilogram, while it had settled at Rs 75,000 per kg in the previous close."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 62,950 per 10 grams, down Rs 100, taking bearish cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,031 per ounce, down USD 4 from the previous close.Gold prices traded slightly down in the European trading session on Monday amid a lack of follow-up buying.*—PTI*

Rupee settles 2 paise higher at 82.89 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

The rupee gained 2 paise to settle at 82.89 (provisional) against the US dollar in a range-bound trade on Monday, tracking volatility in the equity market. Forex traders said inflow of foreign funds and softer crude oil prices provided support to the Indian currency. Also, the dollar retreated from higher levels as investors moved cautiously ahead of inflation and other macroeconomic data to be released in India and elsewhere this week, they said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.88 and finally settled at 82.89 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 2 paise from its previous close. During the day, the rupee witnessed a range-bound movement, touching an intra-day high of 82.86 and a low of 82.91 against the American currency. On Friday, the rupee settled 6 paise lower at 82.91 against the US dollar. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was 0.05 per cent lower at 103.80. *—PTI*

Suffered mild stroke around 6 weeks ago, says Zerodha CEO

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Zerodha Co-Founder and CEO Nithin Kamath on Monday disclosed that he suffered a "mild stroke" six weeks ago. "Dad passing away, poor sleep, exhaustion, dehydration, and overworking out -- any of these could be possible reasons," he revealed in a post on X. While disclosing about his health, Kamath said he had noticed his face drooping and struggled with reading and writing. He expects full recovery in three to six months. "I've gone from having a big droop in the face and not being able to read or write to having a slight droop but being able to read and write more. From being absent-minded to more present-minded," he said. He further said, "I wondered why a person who's fit and takes care of himself could be affected. The doctor said you need to know when you need to shift the gears down a bit. Slightly broken, but still getting my treadmill count". Nithin, along with his brother Nikhil Kamath, founded the discount broking platform Zerodha.*—PTI*

Scindia to inaugurate Jindal's 1st green hydrogen plant

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Union Minister Jyotiraditya M Scindia will on Tuesday inaugurate the stainless steel industry's first green hydrogen project set up by Jindal Stainless Ltd (JSL). Hewill virtually inaugurate the company's green hydrogen project, according to officials. With the inauguration, JSL will become India's first stainless steel company to install such kind of plant on a commercial scale, the officials said. In August 2022, it announced a partnership with Hygenco India. *—PTI*

Paytm shares hit 5% upper circuit

Paytm stock climbs 6 times in 7 days

On 31 January, RBI asked PPBL (Paytm Payments Bank Ltd) to stop further deposits, credit transactions, or top-ups in any customer accounts *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Shares of Paytm owner One97 Communications jumped 5 per cent in the morning trade on Monday after Reserve Bank asked retail payment settlement body NPCI to examine the possibility of migrating Paytm Payments Bank customers using '@paytm' UPI handle to other banks.

The stock of crisis-hit fintech company climbed 5 per cent each to Rs 428.10 and Rs 427.95 apiece -- also its upper circuit limit -- on the NSE and BSE.

In the morning trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark slumped 288.71 points or 0.39 per cent, while NSE Nifty fell 71.55 points to 22,141.15.

On Friday, the scrip of One97 Communications rallied 5 per cent and locked in upper circuit limit on the BSE.

In a bid to prevent any disruptions in the payment ecosystem, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday asked National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to examine the possibility of migrating Paytm Payments Bank customers using the UPI handle '@paytm' to four to five other banks.

- **On Friday, the scrip of One97 Communications rallied 5 per cent and locked in upper circuit limit on the BSE**

The central bank came out with additional steps for the benefit of customers, wallet holders and merchants who are availing banking services from Paytm Payments Bank, which has been barred from accepting deposits and credits after 15 March, 2024.

As the PPBL cannot accept further credits into its customer accounts and wallets after 15 March, 2024, certain additional steps have become necessary to ensure seamless digital payments by UPI customers using '@paytm' handle operated by the bank, and minimise concentration risk in the UPI system by having multiple payment app providers, the RBI said in a statement.

Meanwhile, an advisory committee, set up by One97 Communications after the Reserve Bank's action on its payments bank business, is at a stage of engagement with the company on matters related to the terms of reference for the panel.

The panel's head and former chairman of Sebi M Damodaran on Sunday said, "We have been engaging with the group on matters relating to the Advisory Committee's terms of reference."

He said that the panel members are external advisors and at present Paytm is engaged in dealing with the RBI.

On 31 January, RBI asked PPBL (Paytm Payments Bank Ltd) to stop further deposits, credit transactions, or top-ups in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, and National Common Mobility Cards, after 29 February. Later, the central bank extended the deadline till 15 March.

One97 Communications Ltd (OCL) holds a 49 per cent stake in PPBL.

—PTI

Bond markets begin 2024 on quiet note amid rate cut talks

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

In the wake of a tumultuous end to 2023, characterised by heightened volatility in fixed income markets, the onset of 2024 has brought a relative calmness, albeit with some underlying tensions.

Throughout January, fixed income investors observed marginal increases in yields alongside steeper curves across global developed markets, according to a Morgan Stanley study.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell's remarks against market presumptions of an imminent rate cut in March contributed to higher yields and a strengthening US Dollar.

Meanwhile, emerging markets saw varied yield movements, with some central banks seizing the opportunity to slash rates amidst declining inflation.

In the corporate credit arena, January saw a mixed bag of performances. While Euro investment grade spreads slightly outperformed their US counterparts, credit market spreads generally tightened.

- **Factors such as expectations of central bank easing and a lack of escalation in geopolitical tensions buoyed market sentiment**

Factors such as expectations of central bank easing and a lack of escalation in geopolitical tensions buoyed market sentiment.

However, individual credit volatility persisted due to factors like Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A) rumours and legal proceedings.

Regarding the outlook, while the onset of an easing cycle in developed markets appears imminent, uncertainties linger regarding the pace and extent of rate cuts amidst resilient economic data.

This cautious optimism extends to emerging markets as well, with the potential for continued rate cuts provided developed markets lead the way.

In securitized products, strong demand persisted, leading to tighter spreads, particularly in the US.

Despite rising consumer credit delinquencies and stress in the office sector, residential mortgage credit remained a favoured sector.

January witnessed a two-part narrative in developed market fixed income.

Looking ahead, as central banks navigate a shifting macroeconomic landscape, emphasis on differentiation among countries and credits in emerging markets is expected to intensify.

Emerging Markets Debt (EMD) experienced a mixed performance in January, marked by currency weakening and sovereign spread widening.

Despite outflows in the asset class, valuations remain attractive, with opportunities expected to emerge as developed markets embark on rate-cutting paths. *—ANI*

NIFTY DROPS 90.65 PTS

Sensex declines 352 pts on profit taking

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

Closing in the red for the second straight session, benchmark Sensex on Monday declined 352 points due to profit-taking in IT, metal and consumer durable goods shares amid weak global trends.

The 30-share BSE barometer closed at 72,790.13 points, down 352.67 points or 0.48 per cent over the previous close. As many as 26 index constituents declined while four advanced.

The broader Nifty of NSE dropped 90.65 points or 0.41 per cent to end the day at 22,122.05 points and 37 stocks in the index were in the red.Selling in index heavyweights, including Infosys, TCS, ICICI Bank and Reliance Industries, dragged the benchmark indices into the negative for the second straight session, analysts said.

Among the Sensex shares, Asian Paints fell the most by 3.9 per cent as analysts expressed concerns over rising competition in the domestic paints market following the entry of Aditya Birla group company Grasim Industries into the paints segment.

IT shares Infosys, TCS, HCL Tech, Wipro and Tech Mahindra continued to slide amid inflation concerns *PHOTO: PTI*

IT shares Infosys, TCS, HCL Tech, Wipro and Tech Mahindra continued to slide amid inflation concerns in the US market.

Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Titan, Bharti Airtel, Axis Bank, Kotak Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance and Maruti were among the other Sensex losers.On the other hand, Larsen & Toubro gained the most by 2.36 per cent. Power Grid, HUL and Nestle were also among the gainers.

"The US and India GDP data, eurozone inflation, and US jobless claim data will be influential economic numbers for the central bank to take a call on interest rates, which will dictate market sentiment in the near term," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

The uncertainty over demand and high US inventory pushed oil prices down, Nair added.In the broader market, BSE midcap fell 0.38 per cent while BSE Smallcap slipped 0.06 per cent.

Oil benchmark Brent Crude dropped 0.5 per cent to USD 76.11 per barrel in futures trade.On Friday, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers as they purchased securities worth Rs 1,276.09 crore. *—PTI*

HOTEL SECTOR TO REPORT 7-9% REVENUE GROWTH

KOLKATA, 26 FEB

The Indian hotel industry is expected to register a revenue growth of seven to nine per cent in the next financial year 2024-25, according to a report by credit rating firm ICRA.

ICRA said that sustenance of domestic leisure travel, demand for meetings, incentives, conference and exhibitions (MICE) are the factors which will drive demand in the next financial year, despite a temporary lull during the ensuing general elections.

The research firm said that spiritual tourism and Tier 2 cities are expected to contribute meaningfully to the overall demand in the next fiscal.

According to ICRA, estimates for pan-India hotel occupancy reached a decadal high of 70 per cent to 72 per cent in the current financial year and next fiscal, as compared to 68 per cent to 70 per cent in 2022-23.

—PTI

Businesses restored in Dharavi to get tax refund for 5 years

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

Businesses rehabilitated in Mumbai's Dharavi following its redevelopment will get a refund of State Goods and Services Tax (SGST) for five years. This will provide a boost to the local economy, said Dharavi Redevelopment Project Private Limited, a joint venture between the Maharashtra government and the Adani Group.

The rebate, which will come into effect after the receipt of the occupation certificate, will make businesses more competitive and provide them with growth opportunities, said the DRRPPL.

"Redevelopment will transform the informal nature of businesses in Dharavi and enable them to be a part of the India growth story. To support this transition, the state government has offered tax benefits, like the reimbursement of SGST. This will provide existing and new businesses in Dharavi a robust footing and boost their profitability," said a DRPPL spokesperson.

Dharavi is being redeveloped by the Adani Group to provide flats to eligible residents and hospitals *PHOTO: PTI*

- **Thousands of industrial and commercial units manufacturing garment and leather items function in the area**

SGST will be reimbursed by the state government's Finance Department for five years from the date of issuance of the OC, the company said, adding that the sops will give a massive push to formalise Nav Dharavi's economy.

Dharavi, Asia's largest slum spanning over 250 hectares, is being redeveloped by the Adani Group to provide flats to eligible residents, schools, community halls, and hospitals.

Thousands of industrial and commercial units manufacturing garment and leather items function in the area. Many are vendors for large national and international brands sold across the world, with a turnover estimated to be in millions of dollars. *—PTI*

'Ensure timely completion of cases'

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

CVC has asked government departments, public sector banks and insurance companies to ensure that disciplinary cases are brought to a logical conclusion within the prescribed timelines and without any inordinate delay.

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has said the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) and it have issued guidelines from time to time, impressing upon the organisations concerned for a timely conclusion of disciplinary proceedings.

The commission said it has prescribed model timelines for investigation and conclusion of disciplinary proceedings till the issuance of final orders.

The CVC said the existing instructions and guidelines as issued by the commission and DoPT are "strictly adhered to" by the disciplinary authorities and other authorities concerned.

The chief vigilance officers (CVOs) of the respective organisations may bring these guidelines to the notice of the chief executive officer and all disciplinary authorities concerned, the order said.

The CVC also said in order to ensure a timely and smooth completion of disciplinary proceedings, training needs to be imparted to the prospective and current inquiry officers (IOs) and presenting officers (POs), which will help create a pool of trained IOs and POs in the respective organisations. *—PTI*

WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION SPEAKS

'Global economy weighed down by war and instability'

ABU DHABI, 26 FEB

The head of the World Trade Organisation warned on Monday that war, uncertainty and instability are weighing down the global economy. She urged the bloc to embrace reform as elections across nearly half the world's population could bring new challenges.

WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala sought to offer some praise for her organisation as it held its binneial meeting in the United Arab Emirates, even as it faces pressure from the United States and other nations.

But she was blunt about the risks ahead, as higher prices for food, energy and other essentials sting people's pockets, "fuelling political frustration."

"People everywhere are feeling anxious about the future and this will be felt at the ballot box this year," she said.

None are perhaps more critical for the WTO than the US presidential election on 5 November.

Running again is former President Donald Trump, who threatened to withdraw the US from the WTO and levied tariffs taxes on imported goods.

A Trump win could again roil global trade.

Okonjo-Iweala warned about attacks against multilaterism.

But even if President Joe Biden is re-elected, the United States has deep reservations over the WTO.

The US under the past three administrations has blocked appointments to its appeals court, and it's no longer operating. Washington says the WTO judges have overstepped their authority too often in ruling on cases.

The US also says China floods world markets with cheap steel, aluminium and other products *PHOTO: X*

The US also has criticised China for still describing itself as a developing country as it did when it joined the WTO in 2001.

Washington, Europe and others say that Beijing hampers access to emerging industries and steals or pressures foreign companies to hand over technology.

The US also says China floods world markets with cheap steel, aluminium and other products.

The WTO's 164 member nations will discuss a deal to ban subsidies that contribute to overfishing, extending a pause on taxes on digital media such as movies and video games, and agricultural issues while meeting this week.

But headwinds remain for the organisation and the world's economy, particularly as the recovery from the coronavirus pandemic remains uneven across nations.

Okonjo-Iweala made no mention of Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, though she noted the ongoing disruptions to shipping caused by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea over the conflict.

WTO is also hampered by its voting format, with major decisions requiring consensus meaning countries must actively vote in favour for proposals to take effect. *—AP*

WTO coalitions to help India push for UPI

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Building coalitions with other World Trade Organisation (WTO) members will help India push for the adoption of open and interoperable payment systems like UPI. This will be with a view to cut the cost of money transfers or remittances, a report by think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said on Monday.

— PTI

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

GOVT EXPEDITES INSPECTION OF CRISIS-HIT BYJU'S

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

The Corporate Affairs Ministry has asked its field officers to expedite the inspection of the books of BYJU'S and submit the report, a senior official said on Monday as trouble continues to brew at the edtech firm.

The Ministry, which is implementing the companies law, will decide the further course of action after receiving the report from its regional office.

In July 2023, the Ministry had asked the office of the Regional Director in Hyderabad to conduct an inspection of the company Think & Learn Pvt Ltd, which is registered in Bengaluru.Think & Learn Pvt Ltd operates under the brand BYJU'S.On Monday, the senior official said the Ministry has sought to expedite the inspection and submission of the report with respect to BYJU's.

Specific details about the inspection could not be immediately ascertained.

—PTI

PHOTO: X

KOLKATA METRO TO HAVE 5G UNDER RIVER

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Telecom major Bharti Airtel on Monday said it will provide under-river tunnel 5G connectivity to metro commuters in Kolkata by deploying high-capacity nodes 35m below river Hooghly.

According to a company statement, this will make Airtel the first operator to deliver seamless connectivity through the 4.8km stretch in Kolkata's East-West Metro corridor connecting Howrah Maidan with the Esplanade.

High-capacity nodes at each of these stations have been deployed for seamless connectivity allowing commuters to use high-speed internet, voice calls, and data transmission, it said.

"This initiative to provide under-river tunnel connectivity will certainly make a difference to commuters where they will get to access to high-definition video streaming, gaming, multiple chatting, instant uploading of photos, and more, along with enjoying the scenic stretch below river Ganga," CEO, Bharti Airtel West Bengal and Odisha, Ayan Sarkar said.

—PTI

Ankita Raina seeded 2nd at ITF Women's Gurugram Open

GURUGRAM, 26 FEB

Ace Indian women's tennis player Ankita Raina has been seeded second in the ITF Women's Gurugram Open, scheduled to take place from Tuesday till 3 March. Slovenia's Dalila Jakupovic is the top seed in the main draw, while Lithuania's Justina Mikulskyte is seeded third, followed by Diana Marcinkevica of Latvia. India's Sahaja Yamlapalli has been given the fifth seeding, followed by Sweden's Fanny Ostlund and Jacqueline Cabaj Awad, seeded sixth and seventh, respectively. Anastasia Gasanova of Russia is eighth. In the second-round qualifying matches on Monday, Japan's Ikumi Yamazaki defeated Apurva Vemuri of India 6-0, 6-2, while Michika Ozeki of Japan got the better of Yubrani Banerjee's 6-4, 6-2. India's Vaishnavi Adkar overcame compatriot Sahira Singh 6-1, 6-2, while Ekaterina Kazionova of Russia outlasted India's Richa Dadasaheb Chougule 6-2, 6-2. *—PTI*

Indian shuttler Kandasamy wins Italian Jr singles

MILAN, 26 FEB

Indian shuttler Raksha Kandasamy maintained her dominant run to clinch the Italian Junior singles title defeating compatriot Ananya Agrawal in the final 21-14, 21-12. Raksha had an impeccable run in the tournament held in Milan, Italy from February 23-25 as she did not drop a single game through the course of the competition from the round of 64 to lift the title. In the semifinal, Raksha had produced another one-sided effort getting the better of Indian player Prakriti Bharat 21-10, 21-8. In the quarterfinals, Raksha defeated Slovenia's Anja Blazina 21-9, 21-14. *—PTI*

Messi nominated for Laureus World Sportsman Award

MADRID, 26 FEB

Superstar footballer Lionel Messi was on Monday nominated for the Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award, as he returned to the shortlist after winning the coveted honour last year. The Argentine captain, who lifted the World Cup trophy in 2022, won his record eighth Ballon d'Or in 2023 and led Major League Soccer side Inter Miami to victory in the Leagues Cup for his 44th trophy, another record. The 25th Laureus World Sports Awards will be held here on April 22. Messi will face competition from Manchester City's prolific striker Erling Haaland (Norway), tennis superstar Novak Djokovic (Serbia), world record holder pole vaulter Mondo Duplantis (Sweden), world champion sprinter Noah Lyles (USA) and Formula One star Max Verstappen (Netherlands). Djokovic, who has won the Award four times earlier, clinched three Grand Slam titles -- Australian Open, French Open and US Open -- in 2023 to move to 24 major titles, matching Margaret Court for the all-time mark in tennis. *—PTI*

Pandya returns to competitive cricket after injury layoff

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

India all-rounder Hardik Pandya made his return to competitive cricket on Monday after a long injury layoff with a two-wicket haul in the DY Patil T20 Cup here. Pandya grabbed 2/22 in three overs in Reliance One's win by two wickets in a low-scoring game over Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited at the DY Patil Cricket Academy. Pandya had been out of action since suffering an ankle injury during the ODI World Cup match against Bangladesh in Pune in October and is preparing for a comeback in the Indian Premier League (IPL) as the new skipper of the five-time winners Mumbai Indians.*—PTI*

India secure series win with 3-1 lead

India secure 17th straight Test series win at home

RANCHI, 26 FEB

India's batters Shubman Gill and Dhruv Jurel after winning fourth Test cricket match against England, in Ranchi on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

India's home supremacy weathered the 'Bazball' storm as Rohit Sharma's men secured a hard-fought five-wicket win over England in the fourth and penultimate Test for a 17th consecutive series triumph in their own backyard here on Monday, handing a harsh reality check to the visitors' unidimensional approach.

Overnight 40/0 in a chase of 192 here, India romped home after surviving a few hiccups with the opening duo of skipper Rohit Sharma (55 off 81 balls) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (37 off 44 balls) providing the perfect platform for others to build with their 84-run stand on day four of the match.

There were some jitters after the two departed in close succession followed by Rajat Patidar and Ravindra Jadeja's dismissal but Shubman Gill (52 not out) and Dhruv Jurel (39 not out) guided the side past the finishing line with an unbeaten 72-run partnership.

Left-arm spinner Tom Hartley (1/64) took the prized scalp of Rohit, while Shoaib Bashir was the most successful English bowler, scalping 3/79 in the second innings for a match haul of eight wickets. India lead 3-1 in the series with the last game scheduled in Dharamsala from 7 March. The team's last home series loss was a 1-2 defeat to an Alastair Cook-led England in 2012-13. Since then, India have won 39 out of 50 Tests at home.

"It's been a very hard-fought series, so to come on the right side of it feels very good," said Rohit in the post-match presentation.

The host team's victory marked a stunning downfall for 'Bazball', which has been a much-hyped winning mantra for England since 2022 and is now facing all-round criticism for being too rigid and lacking in depth.

> **YES!!! (Indian Flag). Phenomenal series win by our young team. Showed grit, determination and resilience**
>
> -Virat Kohli, Cricketer

Conceptualised after the appointment of Brendon McCullum as coach and Ben Stokes as captain, England's plan to attack irrespective of circumstances found its match in the unflappable approach of the Indians.

While the visitors remained stubborn barring the conservative hundred by veteran Joe Root here, the Indians adapted and refused to be bogged down by setbacks.

—PTI

'RUTHLESSNESS, HOW DOES IT SHOW ITSELF?' STOKES DEFENDS TEAM

RANCHI, 26 FEB

England captain Ben Stokes on Monday dismissed suggestions that his team lacked ruthlessness in their approach against India as they suffered their first Test series defeat in 'Bazball' era here on Monday.

India beat England by five wickets in the fourth and penultimate Test to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series.

The home team's victory marked a stunning downfall for England's ultra-aggressive 'Bazball' approach, which has been their much-hyped winning mantra since 2022 and is now facing all-round criticism for being too rigid and lacking in depth.

Asked if England lacked ruthlessness against India, Stokes replied: "Ruthlessness? What is it? How does it show itself? "Everyone goes into the game with their best intentions; when it doesn't pay off, people say we're not ruthless, when it does, they say we are," Stokes said in the post-match media conference.

Ben Stokes **PHOTO: PTI**

Stokes emphasised that the perception of ruthlessness can be subjective and often misunderstood.

"I don't really understand it.

That's from my point of view; we try to do what we think is the best way to win a game. It can be a throwaway comment when people say we're not ruthless enough. What does it mean?" he questioned. *—PTI*

Happy to keep up unbeaten record: Men's hockey captain Harmanpreet

ROURKELA, 26 FEB

Indian men's hockey team are behind the Netherlands and Australia in FIH Pro League **PHOTO: HOCKEY INDIA**

The Indian Men's Hockey Team ended their home leg of the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24 on a high note, registering a convincing 4-0 win against Ireland on Sunday. With this victory, the team kept up their record of remaining unbeaten (in regulation time) at the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela, the world's largest seated hockey stadium, which was packed to the brim with die-hard fans from the region thronging to watch their favourite hockey stars in action.

The Indian side led by Harmanpreet Singh and Vice Captained by Hardik Singh registered 2-2 (8-7), 1-1 (2-4), and 2-2 (0-3) draw against Spain, the Netherlands and Australia respectively in regulation time which enabled them to climb up to the third spot in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24 points table behind the Netherlands and Australia.

Expressing their gratitude to the hockey lovers of Odisha, Harmanpreet Singh said, "Playing in Rourkela is always special for us. The incredible support we got energized our performance and we have continued to be unbeaten here, without losing a single game in regulation time. We are happy to keep up this unbeaten record in Rourkela."

The ace dragflicker is also the third-highest goalscorer this season with a total of six goals. "I think we came back from our South Africa Tour feeling mentally and physically fresh. We did a lot of team-building activities there that made us a stronger unit. I think we performed well here, and stood up to the challenge posed by top teams of the world," he stated, lauding his team's efforts.

- Expressing their gratitude to the hockey lovers of Odisha, Harmanpreet Singh said, "Playing in Rourkela is always special for us

India began their FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24 season at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium in Bhubaneswar with a 4-1 win against Spain. In their next game, they recorded a 2-2 (4-2) draw against the Netherlands in regulation time, before losing 4-6 to Australia in a high-scoring game and followed it up with a 1-0 win against Ireland before arriving in Rourkela. *—Hockey India*

ASIAN COMPETITIONS

Bajrang, Vinesh, Sakshi invited to appear for trials

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) on Monday invited protesting grapplers Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and retired Olympic medallist Sakshi Malik to come for the national trials in March to select the team for two top Asian competitions, including the 2024 Paris Games Qualifiers in Kyrgyzstan.

One of the conditions put by the United World Wrestling (UWW) while lifting the suspension on WFI earlier this month was that the three grapplers would not be discriminated against for protesting against former national federation chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.

The three have been demanding the arrest of Brij Bhushan for his alleged sexual harassment of women wrestlers. The sports ministry had also suspended the WFI last year in the wake of the serious allegations and instituted an ad-hoc panel to run the affairs of the sport. The ministry had also ordered fresh elections, which were held in December last year, but the newly-elected body under Sanjay Singh was suspended by the ministry three days after its formation for not giving enough time to age-group wrestlers to prepare and travel before announcing the dates for the nationals.

The ministry again instituted a three-member ad-hoc panel to run the affairs of the sport. WFI, while announcing the trials on March 10-11, also included the names of Bajrang (65kg freestyle), Vinesh (55kg) and Sakshi (62kg), who had announced her retirement from the sport in "frustration" the day Sanjay Singh was elected president.

The three have been demanding the arrest of Brij Bhushan for his alleged sexual harassment of women wrestlers **PHOTO: PTI**

"I would like to inform all affiliated units of WFI that the selection trials to select the teams for participation in the following events are being conducted on 10th and 11th March 2024 at KD Jadhav Wrestling Indoor Stadium, IGI Sports Complex, New Delhi," said Sanjay Singh in a statement. *—PTI*

- The three have been demanding the arrest of Brij Bhushan for his alleged sexual harassment of women wrestlers. The sports ministry had also suspended the WFI last year in the wake of the serious allegations and instituted an ad-hoc panel to run the affairs of the sport

MOST SPECIAL TROPHY FOR KLOPP

Virgil van Dijk headed Liverpool to a record-extending 10th English League Cup trophy by securing a 1-0 win against Chelsea at Wembley on 25 February **PHOTO: X/ LIVERPOOL**

LIVERPOOL WINS ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP

LIVERPOOL, 26 FEB

Virgil van Dijk headed Liverpool to a record-extending 10th English League Cup trophy by securing a 1-0 win against Chelsea at Wembley on 25 February. The centerback's goal in the 28th minute of extra time settled a tense clash that had ended 0-0 in regulation.

It clinched an eighth piece of major silverware for Jurgen Klopp at Liverpool and ensured he will not end his final year at the club empty-handed.

"You should always savour the good moments, this is definitely one of them," Van Dijk said. "I'm so proud, proud to be part of this club and especially proud of the boys."

Klopp will step down at the end of the season, but victory in the League Cup has kept his team on course for an improbable quadruple of trophies. Liverpool currently leads the Premier League table and is still in contention for the FA Cup and Europa League.

Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino was hoping to win his first major trophy in England after previous spells with Southampton and Tottenham. He will have to wait, while Klopp can look ahead to more glory before walking away.

Liverpool and Chelsea had met in both domestic finals in 2022 and on each occasion, Liverpool came out on top to lift the League Cup and FA Cup on penalties after two goalless draws.

This was another close match that saw both teams have goals ruled out for offside and the woodwork hit on three occasions.

Chelsea could have gone ahead early on when Cole Palmer's effort was saved by Caoimhin Kelleher from close range. Later Raheem Sterling thought he had put Chelsea in front after sliding home Nicolas Jackson's cross, but the goal was ruled out for offside in the buildup.

Cody Gakpo's header then left Chelsea goalkeeper Djordje Petrovic standing shortly before halftime, but his effort came back off the foot of the post.

Van Dijk sent Liverpool fans wild in the second half with a powerful header to beat Petrovic, but it was Chelsea's supporters who were left cheering when after a lengthy review it was also disallowed for offside.

Conor Gallagher hit the post in the 76th after flicking Palmer's cross beyond Kelleher and later denied when one-on-one with the keeper. *—AP*

SAUDI PRO LEAGUE

Brazilian footballer Talisca and Cristiano Ronaldo celebrate after scoring goals. Al Nassr made it 10 games without defeat and nine victories in a row as they battled to a 3-2 Saudi Pro League win over Riyad rivals Al Shabab **PHOTO: X/ AL NASSR**

Modric scores late winner for Madrid

Madrid. 26 Feb

Luka Modric rolled back the years with a sublime late winner against Sevilla as Real Madrid moved eight points clear at the top of La Liga. With England midfielder Jude Bellingham absent for Real for a third consecutive game, the contest looked to be heading towards a goalless draw. However, Croatia midfielder Modric, 38, curled in seven minutes after his introduction as a substitute. Modric has started in just 11 of his 21 La Liga appearances this season. *—AP*

MP reach Ranji SF with win over Andhra

INDORE, 26 FEB

Anubhav Agarwal ran through Andhra's batting lineup with a superb six-wicket haul to propel Madhya Pradesh into the semifinals of the Ranji Trophy following a four-run victory over Andhra here on Monday.

In a low-scoring quarterfinal played at the Holkar Stadium, bowlers ruled the roost for the majority of the contest and despite a spirited fight from the visiting side, Madhya Pradesh prevailed to make it to the final four. With this win, the 2021-22 champions Madhya Pradesh became the second team after Tamil Nadu to enter the semifinals. On what turned out to be the final day, Andhra were bowled out for a mere 165 chasing 170 to win on the fourth day.

Resuming at 95/4 and with their senior batter Hanuma Vihari on strike with 75 runs more needed to win, Andhra were the more confident side but Agarwal led a stunning fightback once again for Madhya Pradesh.

> **Sad part is the association thinks that players have to listen to whatever they say and players are there because of them (association). I've decided that I'll never play for Andhra where I lost my self-respect. I love the team. I love the way we're growing every season but the association doesn't want us to grow**
>
> -Hanuma Vihari, Cricketer

Having taken three wickets in the first innings to help Madhya Pradesh take a vital lead of 62 runs, Agarwal terrorised the Andhra batters in the second innings to return figures of 6/52 from 19 overs. Kulwant Khejroliya picked 2/40 while Kumar Kartikeya and Saransh Jain bagged one wicket apiece.

Agarwal struck thrice to put Madhya Pradesh in complete command when he had overnight batter Karan Shinde (14) trapped leg-before in the 51st over of the innings. *—PTI*

Madhya Pradesh players celebrate after winning the match against Andhra by 4 runs, at Holkar, in Indore on Monday **PHOTO: ANI**